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With wishes for a merry
Christmas, to grandfather
with love from

Anne.

Boucher

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The Day Before Yesterday

The Day Before Yesterday

BY

SARA ANDREW SHAFER

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To the Doctor, and the Doctor's Wife ;
to Daffy ; and to the precious memory
of dear Dick.

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The Day Before Yesterday

CHAPTER I

The Village

ONCE upon a time there was a Village, which lives now only in the memory of a few gray-haired men and women, but which was in its day the fairest and the dearest spot the sun ever shone upon.

It has not been blotted out by any terrible elemental forces; it has not been left behind in the swift onrush of life as it is lived in these latter days. Its name—its pretty French name, the legacy of the brave Jesuits who passed that way, long, long ago—still stands in the old place on the map—such a favored place! Indeed, it stands there now in the heavy type by which the map-men pay their respects to places in which there are many railways, and where there is much traffic; but the Village is lost, none the less, and when the old boys and girls go back

to it, it is only now and then that their wistful eyes can find something they have remembered, or some one whom they knew long years ago.

In the lost years the Village lay in the hollow of the palm of the fair prairie, which held it right lovingly, knowing how precious it was. Green billows of waving corn, yellow shoals of bending wheat, gray-green drifts of foamy oats, and crimson tides of rippling clover flowed in to the very edge of the Addition, on whose trim streets the thrifty Germans dwelt apart. Great bur-oaks held themselves together, here and there, whispering of the old wild days they had known before the coming of the Palefaces, and so holding in scorn all petty things, by reason of the nobility of their own great natures, that under them grew no noxious weeds, but rather waving seas of blue-grass, tipped with dandelions, maybe, or with blue violets, or buttercups, —

“The little children’s dower.”

Like jewels a string of lakes and ponds cut by old glaciers, flashed and sparkled, green girdled by the woods. How clear and cool were the waters fed by their hidden springs! How white, how golden, the lilies and the lotus that

rocked in their leafy coves! How free and fleet the fishes that darted through their pleasant depths! There were islets rising here and there, and on these stood the last of a mighty race of pine trees, long since fallen before the greed of man. Polypody grew there, and club-mosses, partridge berries, and pipsissewa, bronzed lichens, and mosses like hoar-frost — all unlike the growths of the mainland, and all long vanished now.

The Village was built as a village should be, with a long vertebral main street, from which, riblike, some cross-streets lost themselves in the prairies and in the ponds. Wide and cool lay the streets, shadowed from end to end by rows of sugar-maples, whose branches all but roofed them in, and bordered by pleasant cottages, each having behind its own white fence, its own garden. Now the fences are gone, and the lawns, trimmed by shrill, whirring machines, are all alike in the careful groupings of cannas, and scarlet sages, and coleus, and pink geraniums. Then every housewife expressed herself, not her neighbor, in her garden, and there was not a bedding-out plant within fifty miles of the borders wherein, under her loving care,

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grew the luxuriant bulbs and shrubs and perennials which she loved. To walk with one of these gentle gardeners through her plantings, was to know an epitome of her life. This rose-bush, with the loosely petalled blossoms offered to June and then withdrawn to wait for another Longest Day, was from a slip Great-grandfather had carried into the Western wilderness when he left the old home, soon after the Revolution, to make a new home for the girl he loved, and for whose sake he cherished it through all the widowed years he bore with cheerfulness and courage, until he went to join Great-grandmother, who had been fifty years in heaven. These great pink mallows were from seed brought into that fearful West before the Eighteenth Century had closed its sad drama of exile. The Sweet Williams were from Mary, who had been so long "away." The little rosy daisies, the tulips, the daffodils, the blue flags, the yellow cowslips, the pink rockets, the rose campion, the Japan quince bush, the Prairie Queen above the porch, the honeysuckles, the lilacs, the syringas, the hearts-ease, the sweet peas — each had its story. None had been bought with money; each was the gift of love, and those were gardens to remember.

Of the Main Street the Court-house was the heart. Built after some dim suggestion of the ideas of Sir Christopher Wren, its pretty white bell tower rose above a colonnade of white pine pillars which showed between the green of many trees. Its bell was used on court days, for fires, for political meetings, and for news from the front in the terrible days of the Civil War, when almost every man capable of bearing arms was standing before the guns. Midnight or midnoon, if over the wires came tidings of victory or of defeat, the bell called the Villagers to hear the message. What tears fell, as a woman, whose heart was broken, turned amid the respectful silence of her neighbors who were *his* friends, to walk back to the home which was darkened forever! What shouts of joy arose when good news came, and how swiftly up to the top of the tall flag-staff went the most beautiful flag that floats! Far over the Village trees the country folk could see the sign of triumph; and the boy at the plough, or the old man at his window, could rejoice that peace was one day nearer to the land he loved, however dearly peace must cost.

About the Court-house stood the little shops

where the ladies went in the Spring and Fall to buy the heavy black silks for state occasions, or the warm brown merinos or delicate prints and fine cotton stuffs with which their simple tastes were pleased in those simple days. The dress-maker who made their gowns and the milliner who trimmed their velvet or net bonnets, or decorated the flapping hats which adorned the heads of their children, were ladies themselves, and quite incapable of smiling at the little economies of making over gowns, or of freshening up bonnets with a new rose or a new plume. What beautiful French roses those were, and what rich plumes! The ladies of the Village tolerated nothing but the best, and would have stood aghast at the offerings of a modern bargain counter. There are no ladies now like those who wore those delicate undersleeves and collars of convent needlework, and in whose glossy hair were such lovely combs of tortoise-shell.

On the side streets stood the Churches with green blinded windows, and with rows of posts outside to which country horses were tied during the long hours of service. Not to go to Church was a thing not to be dreamed of among people of standing, or even of no standing at all.

O pleasant summer Sabbaths, when all the Village bells rang in brotherly chimings regardless of doctrinal differences and the Village folk fared forth into the shady streets! O pleasant sound of holy hymns, wafted through the open windows! O fervent voices lifted in fervent prayer, and in the long expositions of the texts! O sweet stillness of the sunshine, so different in its aspect from everyday sunshine that even without the bells and the stiffly starched collars and petticoats the youngest child must have known that it was Sunday, and O the long, long blossomy Sunday afternoons!

Schoolhouses? Certainly there were Schoolhouses, but these were melancholy, uninteresting places whither one was forced to go for long, unprofitable hours, but of which no normal child would willingly think directly those hours were over. There were so many things to do that were really important, it was hardly to be expected that any one would cherish any affection for those daily prisons; so in the children's minds they did not stand for a tithe of what the smallest workshop, where things were made, stood for.

By a great good fortune the nicest working-

men in the whole world chose the Village as the scene of their beneficent lives—a really very superior race of workingmen, whom all children loved. There were, first of all, the Blacksmiths whose shop was just across the street from Oak House, where the Doctor lived. Glowing iron was beaten there into whatever form the strong-armed smith willed—cling, clang, the hammer fell rhythmically on the anvil, while arms, strong and black, worked at the bellows in the murky depths of the smithy in which fires glowed with a glow unknown to other fires. There was nothing particular to be gotten from the Blacksmith's, although sometimes the boys secured an old horse-shoe, or a few thickish nails which they did not know exactly what to do with. In general, the Village children had the primal acquisitiveness of their race, and frankly liked people or went to places with an honest eye for what they hoped to receive; but from the forge they asked only the smoking fire, the clangor of hammer and anvil, and the pleasant consciousness of the strength of Smiths themselves who ranked high in their regard.

There was the foundry, which had a shrill whistle by which the workman's hours were

measured. Children might not cross the foundry threshold, however agreeable they might have found it to look at the great shafts and boilers that were making, or to watch the whirl of belts and wheels. Now and then some grimy Foundryman was thoughtful enough to bring out a gift of long coils of steel shavings, — fascinating, desirable above all things, — but not really very useful after all; or, better by far, he would give the boys a lump of moulding clay. Marbles could be rolled of this, and baked in the kitchen stove, if the cook were willing; and although these never came to anything, and the boys had plenty of marbles without them, few things do fulfil the expectations formed for them. In this life it is the game which is the great thing, not the winning. The Foundrymen were, therefore, persons to be held in great esteem, and there could be no greater pleasure than to watch the flare of the furnace flames as they were unfurled in fiery banners above the tall chimneys, or the swarms of sparks — the fire-flies of Winter — whirl out of the black funnels, and die out in the cold night air.

A very delightful set of Carpenters also inhabited the Village. Under their benches were

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shavings, so fine and soft that it was a pity one had hair at all, such fine wigs could have been made of them. Among the shavings the Carpenters were wont to throw bits of wood, squares, triangles, oblongs, sometimes even bits that had been turned on a lathe, and were curled or beaded; and all these treasures the kindly craftsmen made free to the children, who might fill hats and aprons and pockets to-day, and come back to-morrow for fresh stores if they liked. Hammers and saws, augurs and chisels and gimlets, and all sorts of interesting shiny things hung against the shop wall. One was even allowed sometimes to hold the spirit-level, and watch the bubble of imprisoned air come and go. That was not often, for one was taught at home not to ask questions, or to be troublesome; but how could one help loving the Carpenters who knew how to use the curious tools, and who were so kind? The children had heard often and often of a Boy who, long, long ago, had worked in the carpenter shop of Joseph, and sometimes they almost expected, in the dim half-knowledge through which children grope, that He might come in, and that they might see Him take the plane, and curl the wood into white

shavings as He made a yoke which should be easy for the oxen to wear.

It has been said that picket-fences stood along the Village streets, but it has not been told why they were there to guard the pretty front-yards. It was because of the cows. Everybody had a cow, and after the morning milking — a function usually performed at the side gate where the border of grass was cropped close by the waiting creatures — they were turned forth, and were free to wander whither their own wills led them, until nightfall brought them back to the milking-pails once more. It was pleasant for the cows, so pleasant that the boys had often to lay aside very important things in order to hunt and to harry home delinquent beasts; but it was not so pleasant for the Villagers, who, although taking their own share in the privilege, only permitted the custom because of the German Vote, — an unseen thing, greatly desired and greatly feared, and which depended largely upon the German cows. The cows themselves seemed quite conscious of their political importance, and thought nothing of staring the stateliest ladies in the face, or of being quite grumpy if the Minister or the Judge poked them

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in the sides with canes. To the children the cows were of all creatures the most fearsome, and in the adventures of their quiet lives figured much as lions might in those of small Numidians. Dark stories were told of certain animals supposed to be of a peculiarly vicious and hooky nature. The boys told these tales, and so frightened the little girls that to them all cows were hooky, and the Old Orchard as terrible as the Inferno.

Now it was in the Old Orchard that the cows did mostly congregate,—and no wonder. The Old Orchard was an unfenced tract, whereon grew some rows of ancient cherry and apple trees. In the Springtime these were veritable Bowres of Blisse, for as soon as the April sunshine gave them leave, the cherry trees hid themselves in garments of bloom so white, so sweet, that it was not strange that every bee for miles around came singing to the feast they offered, and murmured in the snowy flower-cups a song so wonderful that only the smallest children had hearts pure enough to understand it. And they never told it, and if they had no Grown-up could have known what it meant.

After the cherries had shaken down their

bloom in showers of perfumed snow, the apple trees took up the joyful task of making the old orchard into a fairy-land. For the most of the year they relied upon gray lichens or green leaves to deck themselves withal; but when May came laughing over the prairie, they had their week of enchanted youth once more. They were white, they were gray, they were pink, they were silver-green in a wonderful varying scale of color which no other apple trees ever knew. Nobody expected any fruit from them; the little they did bear was too hard and knotty for even the hardiest, hungriest boy, so the boughs could be rifled of their bloom at will, and there might not have been a pink petal left to fall on the close-cropped sward below but for the cows, who lay in the pleasant shade, and by their mere presence kept the children at bay.

Sometimes there were sheep, but not often, and when there were sheep it was Summer. Where they came from, whither they went, who knew? There would be a cry, "Sheep! sheep!" and the picket-fences would straightway be alive with perching children. There would be a thick cloud of dust in the distance, then a sound of bleating in many tones of complaint, from the

loud one of the old horned patriarch who led the flock, to the sorrowful, soft ba-a-ing of the weak-legged lambs. Then there would be the sound of many feet; then the full view of a closely packed drove of many hot, woolly bodies; the slow calls of the men who guided the flock; the sharp barkings of the anxious sheep-dog; the warm scent of the tired animals, a diminishing scale of soft minor sounds; the gradual disappearance of the dust cloud, a thick-quilted pattern wrought by a multitude of little feet in the deep midsummer's dust, and then the children would vanish also, and the deep peace of the day fall once more upon the place.

One's own relations and particular friends were, of course, of the first importance in one's view of the inhabitants of the Village; but besides these there were no end of interesting people who lived in odd corners. Perhaps had the children known these persons, they would not have been so wonderful as they were when they only looked at them, and thought about them, and spoke of them to one another. There was the old gentleman who was called the Major. He was tall and spare, his hair and whiskers were very white, and the skin on his delicate old

face was very pink. Was it always, or only sometimes, that he wore an Indian suit of white buckskin? It seemed to be always, but maybe it was only sometimes, just as it seemed as if it were always that pink damask roses bloomed under his old wife's window. Anyhow, there were leathern fringes around his blouse and down the legs of his trousers, and on the blouse there was a belt and many pockets. He wore a wide felt hat and looked very fierce and warlike, although the only occupation of his life seemed to be going once a day to the Post-office to get his paper.

A little old Englishwoman was also a very delightful person. Where did she live? The children never knew. Out of the sunshine she came, and into it she went — that was all. Ages before the era of short skirts, her skirts were so short that they showed her neat prunella shoes and a glimpse of spotless hose. A shawl of the same black stuff as her gown was pinned over her shoulders in such a way as to display the fine lawn kerchief crossed on her bosom. On her head was a close little black poke bonnet with a little white frill inside, and a stiff little cape behind. She walked with the daintiest steps,

and when she saw one's mother she dropped a courtesy. No one in all the Village did this homage but this tiny, dainty English body, and that one bit of Old World manners would have given her distinction even without the basket, which gave her more. A strong, light basket with a cover and a handle. From under the cover the edges and corners of a snowy-white napkin could be seen. What was in the basket? The children never knew, but it was a subject for endless speculation, and it was generally conceded that something to eat, of a more than earthly flavor, was hidden by that lid.

The little German-French woman, whom they all called "Grossmutter," was no stranger to any child, but was the friend of all. In her garden, beside the flowers and vegetables they knew, were good-smelling herbs of many strange kinds. She always carried a bit folded in with her best handkerchief inside her hymn book when she went to Church, and she let the little visitors help themselves to the fragrant sprigs whenever they would. A willow grew beside her well, the best willow for whistle-making that ever grew anywhere, and she let the boys climb and cut among its branches as much as they liked

while she sat below with her little spinning-wheel, and whirled and drew the thread in the sunshine. Her large dark eyes and brown skin, her nervous motions and her quick sympathies, were "made in France," but her speech was of Germany. She had some charming stories of her native Alsace, and could even remember the great Napoleon and his army when they marched through the province in 1814. Her mother hid her and her pretty elder sister in the flax that was drying in a smoky loft above the cottage kitchen, and Grossmutter could remember taking her turn in peeping through a knot-hole in the floor, and seeing her mother bending over the fire as she cooked for the hungry soldiers who came and went during all the long hours of her imprisonment.

Sometimes the streets were enlivened by pageants that lived long in memories which had not much to remember. A Circus might come to town, or the Firemen might have a parade, or, best of all, there were the political processions that always came in October. Of course those of the political party to which one was affiliated were of the more vital interest, and the small politicians were deeply versed in the

proper number of bands, the representations from various country neighborhoods and election precincts, and the general amount of enthusiasm proper on such occasions. To have one more band playing the national airs; a dozen more horseback-riders, or even an extra illustrative "float" than could be shown by the opposing faction, was essential to the honor of the candidates one was supporting with frantic wavings of the flag, and jeering flings at boys of the "other side" who stood on corners with tongues derisively extended, or sneering smiles and pointing, scornful fingers. On election days, which seemed shortly to follow in the wake of a Parade, — when little girls were compelled to walk to school by way of back streets, in order to avoid the highly interesting fights sure to occur about the polls, — it was almost a law that each child have a printed ballot pinned to its jacket or pinafore, and many and scathing were the taunts flung next day at the adherents of the cause that was lost.

The Village itself is lost now, and almost all of the men and women — yes — and the children, too, who lived there in the sweet old days, have fared for the last time over the long roadway

that leads to the still God's-acre, and have crept under the green coverlet into the silence where they have found all they ever longed for. Before it is too late, one of them would fain hand on to another generation some of the brightness of long-lost years, and so, without further preface begins the story of a little group of children who lived in the Village of the Day before Yesterday.

CHAPTER II

The New Gown

To Rachel the Village was the whole of the great, round world. There were, she knew, other places to which people sometimes went, and from which they sometimes came, but they were vague and unimportant. Father went to them sometimes, and Mother had been, but not often, and not since Rachel could remember. Perhaps it was because they had no time for travel; perhaps it was because they liked staying in the Village best: this was the more probable reason, since it was, undoubtedly, place enough for any sensible person. Still there was Virginia, where Grandmother had been a little girl, and of which her stories were so many and so fascinating, and there was Ohio, which had been the family stepping-stone for a generation, in its following of the sun. These, first and best. Then there were France and Holland, where other and older grandparents had been born;

and Ireland and Scotland, which had been home to others; and there was Boston, where an ever-so-many-years-ago great-grandfather had been whipped at the cart's tail for being a Quaker. Rachel was very glad the family had left off being Quakers. She liked dear Mother's white horse-hair bonnet trimmed with lace, and with cherries of a most wonderful cherryness, far better than the plain head-gear old Mrs. Dale wore, and she would have cried her eyes out to see dear Father whipped at the cart's tail; so the family religion suited her, as did, in all things, that place in life to which it had pleased God to call her. The other places were, moreover, probably not very far off, — Bagdad, the Sand-hills of Jutland, the Alhambra, the Island of Cyprus, and all the adventurous, glittering, perfumed blossomy fairy-land in which her thoughts spent most of their time. The people who walked about the quiet Village streets were hardly more real to her than the knights and ladies, the trolls and witches, the giants and fairies, of her imagination, and were, indeed, by that same imagination invested with attributes and characters, and bidden to perform deeds by her wild fancies of which they were wholly unaware. Many staid

and respectable men figured before her as monsters of a most monstrous wickedness, and were attainted by her of crimes of magnitude; and many poor but pretty girls were decked out, in her eyes, in jewels of price and robes of regal magnificence; while to wear ugly clothes and have unlovely manners were quite enough to relegate anybody at all to the realm of witchcraft.

It was, therefore, with feelings of horror that Rachel heard her doom.

"My dear," said the Doctor's Wife, "I have taken my changeable silk dress to the Misses Tucker to be made over for you. They will be ready to try it on you at ten o'clock this morning, and you must start by half-past nine. Mind you do not play along the street, and behave prettily and quietly while you are there."

The Misses Tucker! Didn't dear Mother know that they were the worst of all the witches? Even Sophy Jane was afraid of them, and Sophy Jane was almost twelve.

"Oh, Mother, won't you go with me?"

"No, my dear; I cannot spare the time."

"Mayn't Dick and Daffy go?"

Dick interposed:—

"To the Miss Tucker-Girls? Not much!"

"Daffy may go if you will not make the little thing run, or let her fall down. Now, Rachel, stop frowning. You are to go, and you are to go properly. I do not wish to hear anything more about it."

At half-past nine Rachel's hat was firmly adjusted to her head, and the elastic cord that held it on was snapped into place by the relentless Tutu. Tutu was the nurse. Daffy's pretty curls were twitched into place by the same tiring-maid but with gentler hands. The gum string that held on her hat was too tight, and marked her round throat with a deep crease. The ringlets were adjusted in a way that tickled her ears in a manner very distasteful to the little girl. She never thought of protesting. Tutu always did things so; probably there was no other way. Daffy was not speculative; she was only patient.

Tutu opened the front door. Just inside the gate stood the Cousins. Molly held a note in her hand.

"We've come to stay until twelve o'clock," they announced. "Mother sent this letter to Aunt Kitty, and everybody is invited to the Old

House to spend the day to-morrow. There's going to be a Show in the Old Orchard."

The Cousins lived in the Old House with Grandfather and Grandmother and the Aunts. The other grandparents, those who lived at Linwood, were called Grandpa and Grandma, and though the Doctor's children loved all of the dear old people most tenderly, it was to Grandmother and Grandpa that their hearts turned for the kindest sympathy and the readiest aid in time of trouble. So to go to Grandpa's at Linwood, or to Grandmother's at the Old House, was an event of most joyful importance.

"Oh, Tutu," gasped Rachel, "do you suppose the Miss Tucker-Girls will have my new dress done by then?"

"Indeed they won't, and if they did, do you think I'd let you go gallivanting about all day with it on your back? It'll be your Sunday-go-to-meeting for one long day, and Daffy's after you've outgrown it if there's anything left of it but rags, which there mostly isn't of your things," said the severe Canadian, who would have died cheerfully for any one of her charges (especially Dick, and especially Daffy), but who

felt it to be part of her duty toward them to keep their feet set sternly in the narrow way. "Run along now, all of you. I am going to make pies this morning, and you shall each have a little turnover when you come back, if you're good."

That sounded encouraging, and four were better than two if an assault on the witches' den were inevitable; so they set off rather cheerfully, after all.

It was a long way to the little cottage. It had but one story, but it had two front doors: one for use, and one before which was no doorstep, no path, and no gate, and which was never opened—a most mysterious door. A row of small-paned windows stretched between these doors, and over these grew mouldy lilac bushes shutting out the northern light from the clean little rooms within. Even now, when the year was at high lilac-tide, only a few pale clusters bloomed on the ancient bushes, and the fragrance of these was shut out from the house by the firmly closed sashes. How could people shut out the scent of the lilacs?

Within, on three rush-bottomed chairs, slept three yellow cats, and on three "rockers" sat

the three old ladies who made the dresses of the Village children. Their mothers took their own gowns to more modern mantua-makers; but it was a point of honor to give the children's best things to the Misses Tucker, who had lived in the cottage and "made over" for fifty years at least. Probably they had been called "The Tucker girls" once in their far-away youth, and although they had merited the more respectful title of the Misses Tucker since before one's mother was born, the "Girls" was added so often as an additional distinction that they were seldom spoken of without that suffix. They were, indeed, most highly thought of.

To their needle craft the ladies added the dispensing of things that were good for all sorts of illnesses and accidents, and among the poorer sort had a large *clientèle*, upon whom they exercised their benevolence and their skill. Even now, although the late May air was so warm that the children wore only thin cotton gowns, a wood fire burned smartly in the stove on which, in little pots and pans, herbs and fats were stewing and simmering themselves into *tisanes* and ointments of most potent odors.

Rachel might be sent to the Misses Tucker to have a gown made, but the Doctor was often provoked beyond endurance by the very irregular practice of these amateur healers. It was, indeed, hard for him to be called in too late to help a man with pneumonia, who had relied too long upon their boneset tea and their horehound syrup. It was discouraging after spending weeks in getting an old woman out after a severe attack of inflammatory rheumatism, giving both attendance and medicine freely and without thought of fee, to have the cure heralded about as being due to a brass ring worn upon the left thumb, and a buckeye suspended about the neck by a red cord, in pursuance of the advice of the Miss Tucker-Girls; and when poor little Tim McGuire died of a tuberculous swelling, with no other aid than that afforded by hanging a canary bird in every window in the house, under their direction, the wrath of the Doctor was open and great. But why rail at fate? In all ages and lands have there not been wise women to whom the common people flocked gladly? Why should not the weird sisters of the Village have their following?

The children came slowly out of the sunshine

into the warm gloom of the chamber, where on the white bed lay the little frock ready for its fitting.

Now even in the richest families of the Village no one ever thought of buying a silk gown for a little girl. When a *demoiselle bien élevée* was of an age to appear in such raiment, the wardrobes of mothers and aunts were examined, and a laid-aside garment of suitable color and texture was chosen, to be made over for the small candidate for silken honors. If she were an elder daughter, she wore it gravely and in the fear of the elders, by whose decree it was to descend to the *cadette* of the household. Only sisterless children made free with these robes of state. It was an honor to have such a dress, but it was a responsibility. Rachel did not like responsibility, so she went in slowly, and surrendered herself reluctantly to Miss 'Lizabeth's strong, bony fingers.

Miss 'Lizabeth disrobed the little maiden with much such a show of tenderness as a 'longshoreman might show to a bag of potatoes, and she dragged the shining silk over the close-cropped head much as he would haul a piece of tarpauling over a barrel of oysters. Miss 'Liza,

who did the buttonholes, had gentler touches; but Miss 'Liza had no idea of style.

"Stand still, Rachel!" she warned.

Out came the big shears from Miss 'Lizabeth's basket; out came a thick needle with a long tail of white cotton from the bosom of Miss 'Lizabeth's gown; out came a handful of pins from the pinball hanging by Miss 'Lizabeth's side, and into Miss 'Lizabeth's mouth went every pin.

Snip! Stitch! Pull! Pin! Snip again! It was awful.

"Can't you stand any straighter, Rachel? You can't? Do tell! I declare, you're getting to be that slab-sided I never saw your equal. Do you ever have pains in your back, or your hip? Are you *sure* you don't? I do hope to mercy all this lop-shoulderedness don't mean hip-joint. It don't run in your family; but you never can tell. There you go down again! Look, Sis' 'Lina! look, Sis' 'Liza! Ain't she crookeder 'n when we made her blue merino before Christmas?"

"She certainly is," declared Miss 'Lina after a long inspection both through and over her spectacles. "I wonder her pa don't doctor her for it, though he's a master-hand for doing noth-

ing, I will say that. If it's hip-joint, girls, I don't think we ought to let his prejudices stand in our way. 'Ye can't serve God and mammon,' and I should never forgive myself, nor you either, sisters, if that poor little child went hop-and-fetch-it — a limpy, little lame dog all her life, just because we'd failed to do our duty. 'Liza, you get the steam-bath ready, and I'll hunt up some of that liniment that did old Jerry Bangs so much good when he had shingles, while 'Lizabeth's fitting the sleeves."

"Do stand still, Rachel! There! I've cut a jag right in front where it'll show, and all because you wiggle so."

"Perhaps poor Rachel has St. Vitus," said Miss 'Liza. "It wouldn't be anyways unlikely. The Doctor's got an awful temper. A man like that is very apt to have a child with fits and things. I will get the steam-bath ready, Sis' 'Lina, of course, and I don't say no to the jimson salve, though it *does* smell awful; but I do insist on quieting her nerves with a good dose of valerian before 'Lizabeth spoils the dress completely."

At the mention of the good dose, the juniors prudently withdrew. The treat might include

them ; they did not know. Rachel was left defenceless. Her brow darkened. She could venture on no open act of resistance with those great, sharp shears so close to her shuddering neck, and with all those pins bristling at her from Miss 'Lizabeth's mouth. One great-grandfather had been whipped at the cart's tail, it was true ; but two others were at Valley Forge. She felt their blood in her veins.

Through the pins Miss 'Lizabeth expressed her views. Her accents were muffled, but her convictions were plain.

"It may be hip-joint, and it may be St. Vitus. I don't say no ; but I do say there's a good deal of spared rod and spoiled child right here and now. The Doctor and his wife mean well. I give them credit for that ; but if ever I have a child and it stands first on one foot and then on the other, humping up and humping down, and looking blacker 'n thunder like this one, I'll just acknowledge that the Lord's forsaken me, and it's time to begin a hand-to-hand tussle with the Old Boy. There, Rachel, praised be Peter, I'm through with you, though how the dress will look, fitted on a squirming eel, all bones and no flesh like you, I don't pretend to

guess. Pinked-out ruffles and green velvet ribbon don't make up in my eyes for a proper-setting waist. Now take off your petticoat, and Miss 'Liza will put you in the steam-bath after you've had your valerian, and Miss 'Lina'll rub on the jimson salve. If they don't help you, they won't hurt you, and the Tuckers will have done their duty."

Rachel made one grab for her old gown, lying over a chair-back. She made another for her hat, and she made one dart, past the cats, past the steam-bath and the stove, past the astonished old ladies, and out of the one available front door. In her red petticoat and white underbody she stood at the gate, free and defiant.

"Come back, Rachel! Oh, come back," screamed the scandalized ladies.

"Oh, Rachel, ain't you 'shamed?" piped the three little girls from under the apple tree of their retreat.

"No; I ain't ashamed. No; I won't come back," she declared. "I haven't got a hip-joint, and I ain't a St. Vitus, and Father hasn't got an awful temper, and I won't go in the bath, or be rubbed with salve, or take any nasty old dose whatever. I mean never to have any more new

clothes as long as I live. Mother doesn't want me ever to be unrespectable, and I don't want to be either; but you are very wicked old women. All three of you."

Without further ceremony she backed out on the sidewalk, where she put on her gingham gown, and walked off haughtily down the street. Her air was the air of a conqueror, although the buttons on the back of the little waist flapped about in total disregard of the empty button-holes. The terrified, admiring juniors followed silently, not daring to offer to button her up. There were times when Rachel's toilet was not to be criticised.

They walked along. It was warm and sunny. Almost everybody had lilac bushes in their front yards, and the air was sweet with their perfume. As they turned a corner, Molly produced from her pocket four little currant cakes, deliciously frosted. Grandmother had given them. Grandmother never forgot how hungry children get between meals.

They sat down on some carriage steps and nibbled the cakes. It was a point of breeding to eat off the bottoms first, to pick out all the currants for a second course, and to save the

frosting for dessert. Boys, of course, ate theirs in gulps; but this was the accepted procedure for girls.

Rachel bit savagely into her cake, forgetting the rules, and eating five currants in the first bite. Then she remembered her manners. The cake had a very good and softening effect, and by the time she had carefully licked the last grain of sugar from her fingers, she was at peace with all mankind.

"My dress is going to be lovely," she announced. "I always admired that silk, — little green threads one way, little pink threads the other, — so you can't really say whether it's pink or green. Like some little leaves. It doesn't rattle much; but when I wear it to Church, if I scrape up close to the pews, I'll bet it'll swish some. I'm going to keep it real nice, so when you're grown up, Daffy, you can have a silk dress, too. Molly's going to have one when she's ten. Hers is going to be lovely, too, made out of Auntie's blue-and-salmon. I'll tell you what let's do. Let's be real fashionable and talk about clothes. I will tell about my wedding dress."

"Let me begin," pleaded Molly. "You al-

ways do, and by the time you're left off, there's nothing left for us to choose."

"I'm the oldest," Rachel began the time-honored phrase, but suddenly relented. "Betty, you go first, you're the youngest."

"My dress—my dress," said Betty, thoughtfully. She had not expected to be called on so soon, and she was hardly prepared. "My dress is going to be lovely, too. I'm going to be married in a black silk dress that can stand alone, trimmed with black crape. It's going to be looped up with pink roses, and I shall have a lace parasol and a silver card-case, and a long white veil. That's all," she concluded suddenly.

"When I'm married," began little Daffy, looking down, "I shall have a red dress, and a red hat with red feathers, and little red gloves and shoes, and a set of furs like Mother's. I shall ride to church on my new red sled, and Major shall pull it, and he shall have a red ribbon on his collar, and everything shall be pretty and red."

Molly considered more seriously.

"I like white brides best, so I shall be a white bride. Satin for my gown, with the longest kind of a train, and perfectly enormous hoops. It's

going to have roses all over it, and when I step out of the carriage, I shall step *so*, so the people can see my white slippers. I'm going to carry a white Prayer-Book, and — ”

“Oh my, Molly, your Mother'd never let you! 'Piscobals do that. You'd better leave that out, 'cause Grandfather'd be vexed at you if you ever even pretended to be anything but a Presbyterian. Daffy and I could be more librul, because our other Grandpa isn't a Presbyterian at all. He goes to that nice little church where they chant, and where you can walk about, if you're little, and sit with your different relations. We nearly always go there, so if we'd said we'd carry a Prayer-Book, we could, or even a rosary like Mary Baily does when she goes to Mass, because I've heard them say what a librul church that one is. I *shall* carry a rosary, now I think of it, of large pearls and diamonds, and all the kinds of precious stones that grew in Aladdin's cave. It will just suit my dress, and when I drop it in my agertation, and my lordly bridegroom restores it to me with a low bow, I mean to make out it's of no consequence, so everybody will see how rich and librul I am. I shall have a train of

white velvet embroidered with gold butterflies as big as hens, and gilt lace on my sleeves, and a veil and a bridal crown. I shall walk *so*," she illustrated, swinging her brief skirts with great elegance, "over a path of roses and lilies and hollyhocks. All the fountains will run with wine, and money will be scattered in the streets —"

"There aren't any fountains," interrupted Daffy, the downright. "And you know very well, Rachel, that Father isn't going to throw money in the streets."

"I shall ride in a golden coach," went on Rachel, expansively. "And I — why! what's the matter? What are you all crying about?"

"Oh, Rachel, your things are so much finer than ours! no one will look at us!"

"Hush instantly, crying in the street as if you all had colic!"

"Yes, but — Rachel —"

"Oh, look! There goes a red-painted wagon that just *must* belong to the Show. Don't you see the man in uniform throwing off bills? Don't you hear the horn toot? Take Betty's hand, Molly,—take mine, Daffy, and hold fast! Run as hard as ever your legs'll let you. Ain't

it lucky I had to go to the Miss Tucker-Girls to have my dress fitted? Tutu'd never have let us out on the street; but now we are out, it seems as if it was our duty to get some of these lovely pink bills. Run!"

CHAPTER III

Show Day

Boys have many advantages above those vouchsafed to girls — so many, indeed, that it is hardly worth while to begin counting them. Never, however, are they so many or so great as on Show Days. Perhaps things have changed since then; but when Rachel was ten, nothing could be imagined so delightful as being a boy when a Circus was holding in the Old Orchard.

The excitement began at least a fortnight before the great day. A red wagon appeared in the streets. Whence? Out of the skies, probably, for surely not of this earth was that red paint, that brilliant gilding, those masterpieces of art, the groups of animals and birds depicted on its sides. Not of earth those strong piebald horses decked off with pompons and with bells.

The wagon was driven about the village, stopping at the most curious places: at the ends of factories and of stables; at the sides of old

warehouses; and at long stretches of tight board-fences. These blossomed as the rose before the wagon moved on, with huge posters presenting a foretaste of the glories that should be, — prancing steeds, beautiful flying acrobats, and snarling lions and tigers grouped about a trainer to whose peril that of Daniel was as nothing. A thousand delights were spread out on the posters. The date of the Show was printed in large type, and the name of the Village received immortal honor from being associated with an event of such magnitude.

Children stood in rows before the posters. They made pilgrimages to all the shrines that they might miss nothing of the pictured splendors. The date was firmly fixed in their minds, and they asked one another with burning anxiety: —

“Are you going to the Show?”

Rachel hated being asked. She was almost sure that she would not be allowed to go; but she hated to say “no” outright. It seemed not only to lower her social standing, but to give a final blow to her feeble hopes. So she temporized: —

“I have not heard Mother say.”

Mother had some very strict ideas. When

she said anything, she would be very apt to say "no" without any temporizing.

The Teachers were, it was true, of the common order of teachers, dull, heartless, and unsympathetic; but sometimes they were almost more than human in their understanding. They pretended not to see the chicken feathers tied together with strips of red flannel sticking out of the boys' pockets, or to know that two bands of hostile Indians were camped in the school playground. The chicken feathers were to be tied on the boys' heads when they went out on the war-path, and it was then that they would rub their faces with the different colored chinks that were in their other pockets. They really did not know that the boys had knives borrowed from the kitchen dresser buttoned up inside their jackets; if they had, they would have taken them away. This would have been a pain to the boys.

On the day before Show Day the Teachers announced that there would be no school on the morrow. Everybody now studied as hard as ever he could, and recited as well as possible. Nobody munched apples behind his geography; nobody made faces in the safe shelter of her

slate; nobody whispered. When school was over, everybody went out quietly, and each one bowed politely at the schoolroom door. They had been taught to turn at the door, and to bow to the Teacher, and to the remaining pupils. On other days they merely jerked their heads; on this day their bows were really courtly.

The children all went to bed directly supper was over. They had no lessons to learn, and they were ready to shorten the night as much as might be by sleep. Tutu took them to their rooms and heard them say "Our Father," and "Now I lay me," and "God bless everybody and make us good children," and then they had climbed into their soft, comfortable beds. Tutu sat beside Daffy's crib next to the open door of Dick's room, and began to read the Chapter. It was Tutu's hour of rest, and oftener than not the Chapter was prolonged into a whole history. She was not one of the women who are capable of stopping off and leaving Joseph in the pit, or the plagues of Egypt only half finished, just because she had read to the end of so many verses. She read the story straight through, stopping now and then to ask if anybody had gone to sleep. No one but Daffy ever had gone.

In that way Tutu performed her own devotions and instructed her charges in Biblical history at the same time. A map of the Holy Land hung above Tutu's bed. Rachel looked at it while she listened to the stories. She was a large girl before she knew what one long, strange word on the map meant—Mediterranean. She wondered what it had to do with King David or the Shunamite Woman. Something, doubtless, but she never thought to ask.

Paul had come to spend the night with Dick, and the next morning, when Tutu came to call Rachel and Daffy, both boys were gone. By what means those sleepyheads had aroused themselves nobody knew; but they were gone. Up the long, pleasant street the boys had trudged, out into the country lanes where the summer morning lay dim, still, and cool; out past Grandpa's, where no one was astir but the gentle master of Linwood, whose fond habit it was to greet the dawn with his grateful praise for the gift of another day. The house looked strange in the deep shadow of the giant white pines, and it was yet more strange to go past and not to go in.

At the corner of the road the caravan was

turning. Great vans were there that held the tent canvas and the seats; long wagons piled with poles and heaped with rope. Other vans with trunks and boxes; other wagons filled with the impedimenta of the recently broken camp. There were troops of led-horses; there were dozens of gayly painted wagons for the animals; there were ponies and camels and elephants, and a silent, clumsy calliope, and oh! there was the Golden Chariot for the band!

Other boys had come out to meet the show; many other boys, in fact every boy in the Village, had come. They greeted one another with the blank stare of boyhood. There was one thought that animated every breast, and that was to get as near as possible to the Golden Chariot, and to walk into town touching its glorious, gilded surface with their battered little hands. What was the good of such contact? No boy knew, but it was a thing greatly to be desired.

The caravan was not arranged in the order of its later progress. It straggled along the road in the most slipshod fashion. The horses were ungroomed, men lay asleep on the wagons, faces downward. There were no beautiful young ladies at all, only some ugly old women, with

tired faces, who sat listlessly on the vans, or rode slouchingly on horseback. Covers were drawn over the best wagons, still one knew from the strange and fearsome sounds that came from under them that wild creatures of many strange and fearsome kinds were hidden under the dusty tarpauling. The boys were too savage themselves to know how brutal it was to torture wild things with captivity.

The elephants were turned loose in a pasture that had been rented for their use near the town ; so were the horses ; so were the camels. To see such creatures walking about in a clover patch, or the pasture where the big boys often played ball, was bewildering. Several of the little boys went no farther than the Virginia fence which guarded the meadow. They climbed to the top rail, and sat there spellbound.

There was a freshly ploughed ring in the sod at the end of the Old Orchard, and there was not a cow in sight. Even the hookiest of the German cows failed to assert her rights of pasturage when Show Days came.

Around the ring, wagons were drawn. Men cooked things over little open-air fires, and other men ate and drank, standing about or leaning

against wheels. Then they unloaded the vans. There was first a mountain of canvas, then there were stacks of poles and piles of ropes. In an incredibly short time they were all raised, and pulled and guyed, and hammered and shifted into tents—a vast, central tent and a number of smaller ones. The smaller ones were for the side-shows.

A great deal of water is needed by a Show. This the boys knew, and they knew something else as well, so they offered to fetch water. Buckets were given them, and they went to wells in yards near by and filled the buckets. Nobody would refuse to let the boys get the water at his well on Show Day, although he might, very properly, have objected to letting the Show men do so. How else were the boys to get their tickets to the Show? It was eminently the thing for self-respecting boys to earn their tickets thus, even if they had more than twenty-five cents in their banks. Few boys had. So they carried and carried the water until they ached from head to foot, and their legs were soaking wet with the drops that had splashed over. Finally they had carried enough, and blue tickets were given them, — “Admit one.”

It was past eight o'clock when Dick got home. Tutu made him change all his clothes before she gave him the good hot breakfast she had saved for him. His dark little face was flushed, his beautiful, great soft eyes glowed. The little sisters gathered close to the end of the table at which he sat, and listened breathlessly to his accounts. Eleven elephants! It was not to be believed! Ponies not much bigger than Major! It was incredible!

Rachel and Daffy were dressed for the day, not in their best dresses, but in very pretty light cotton frocks. Daffy had on her coral beads. Rachel had lost hers, but when they had had their photographs taken for presents to the Grandparents, she privately borrowed Sophy Jane's so that Daffy might not seem overdressed.

Tutu was arranging a large basket. In it she was putting several kinds of sewing, with the proper sewing things. She never went out for a day of idle pleasure. She had, also, three lemon pies in the basket. There were, it is true, plenty of pies at the Old House, but it was Tutu's idea of good manners to take things along for a present when one went visiting. The Doctor's Wife at first objected to this practice; but Tutu

was much older than she, and much more masterful, so she gave over objecting, and the pies always went where the family went. They were delicious pies. Tutu made them before breakfast.

By nine o'clock Sophy Jane and Jimmy arrived, and the Cousins, and a large contingent of other children. Processions always passed the Doctor's. The yard was large and shady, and the fence was admirably adapted to perching purposes. There were also wooden boxes to guard the big maple trees on the grass strip between the sidewalk and the road, and a large and pleasant carriage block. So on days when there were parades it was a very desirable place to go to.

The children chose places. The girls took the carriage block, the boys the tree-boxes. Sophy Jane and Rachel wished for tree-boxes also, but this Tutu forbade. She said their clothes were whole for once, and she had no idea of sewing up slits on Show Day,—so they stood on the carriage block.

Farmers had been coming into town since very early. If their horses were safe horses, they were tied to posts along the streets; if they were not

safe, they were unharnessed and led away to stables. The farmers' wives and daughters called on people whom they knew. A great many of the Doctor's patients had already arrived to enjoy his porch. Mary Baily had placed all the dining-room chairs out on the lawn.

Then the Germans from the Addition came down. They brought all their children. One would hardly have believed that there were so many children in the world. They sat on the Church steps, on the stones at the Stone-cutter's — anywhere.

The Grandparents and all the relatives who lived in the country arrived. The little girls got off the block as each carriage drove up. Grandpa had brought a basketful of big hickory nuts expressly for the children. Dick came down from the tree-box to count them out. Paul and Jim came down to get their share. The shares were always exactly alike when Dick counted. He was a just boy.

The wind was from the west, and blew faintly and fitfully ; but by and by one could really hear the drum, — not plainly, — but still really. Then the tune could be distinguished.

Then the procession turned into Main Street

at the corner of the grove. There was no longer any cause for doubts and tremors; there would certainly be a procession.

First there came a large man on a white horse. He backed the horse all the way down the street, and shouted, and waved his hand mysteriously to the people of the Show. Probably he owned the Show.

Then came the Indians, feathers, moccasins, bows and arrows, scalping-knives, war paint and all. They did not look at the boys, but the boys were dumb with the rapture of looking at them.

Then came the horsemen and horsewomen. What beautiful and gracious ladies! What proud and handsome cavaliers! What plumes and saddle-cloths! What life could exceed theirs for splendor and charm?

Then came the camels. Then the open cages with the lions, like large, sleepy cats. Here, in another cage, sat a woman of peerless loveliness surrounded by the folds of mighty serpents. Here were wagons and wagons adorned with scenes from Scripture. The children knew what nearly all of them meant from the bedtime Chapters. On one sat a red-and-white clown, nodding and grinning and making grotesque

faces. Now the elephants were coming. Yes; there were actually eleven! Then the ponies; yes; Major was almost as big as they! Then into every ear went a finger as the calliope thundered by, screeching out its pretexts for tunes, and then, after many other splendid and wonderful sights, the Golden Chariot holding the scarlet bandsmen playing away for dear life. Dozens of boys walked proudly beside the Chariot, touching it with their hands. It was a marvel that none of them were run over, but none were.

Young men from the country, driving with their sweethearts in smart top buggies, followed the Golden Chariot, and then the parade was over.

Tutu marshalled the children and set forth with the basket over her arm. Some of the country relations said that they might spend the day as well as not, now they were in town, but Mary Baily would get the dinner. There were plenty of lemon pies left. Tutu made the children walk before her so that she could count them now and then, and she took them by the Longest Way, and so avoided what most they wished to see, — the crowd already gathered in the Orchard.

Dick and Paul ate but little dinner. They were so afraid of being late. The Show would not begin until two o'clock, and the gate-keeper had told them that the tents would not be open to the public until quarter-past one. Dinner was at twelve o'clock on purpose; but the boys thought it wise to carry their pie in their hands and eat it out on the Common. Grandmother gave each one a pocketful of little sugar cakes, in case of an emergency. One of the Aunts had an orange apiece for the children, and another treated to five cents all around. Everything was as it should be.

The little girls were not to go to the Show. They greatly wished to do so, but it was not considered best that they should. Lucy went by, and so did the Warrenders. Rachel lost her temper and stamped her foot. She said it was a shame that she could not go also — a burning shame. Then she began to cry. Then she left off crying and stopped being disagreeable.

Grandfather did a very unexpected thing. No one supposed that he had noticed that it was Show Day; but now he laid down the Commentary on the Bible in which he was reading about the Prophet Ezekiel, and said that if the little

girls liked, he would take them out for a walk on the Show-grounds. He took off his spectacles, and he took up his hat, and then he was ready to set forth.

It was decided that he should take only two at a time. The Aunts feared that he might get to thinking about Ezekiel and forget how many children he had started out with; so it was thought better for him to take two walks, and only as many children at a time as could hold fast to his hands. He took the smaller ones first. They came back, after a very long while, speechless with wonder and with joy.

Rachel and Molly now took his hands and they went off in the direction of the main tent. People were going in, some paid at the door, and some held out tickets already purchased: red for Grown-ups; blue for children. A great many people were going in. It certainly would be crowded in the tent.

The band was playing, not music one knew, but a low, alluring marking of time: now softer, now louder, but always in minor tones. Different kinds of music came from the smaller tents. One held one's breath.

Boys were prowling about, waiting to hook

in. Some of them had already found an opportunity to do so, and were wriggling in under the canvas, on their stomachs. Their legs stuck out so far it was a wonder they were not pulled back. Some of the Show men were laughing at the boys. It showed what very nice men they were, that they did not prevent the boys from hooking in.

Behind the tents, horses that were not performing horses ate out of troughs, and drank the water the boys had fetched. Some men, not on duty, lay on the dusty grass and slept. Some had their hats pulled over their eyes. One man lay with his face bared to the skies. His hair curled a little over his forehead. Any one would have felt sorry for him, he looked so young and so sad.

In front of the side-shows stood men who were talking faster than would have been thought possible for any one to talk. They were telling about what could be seen within, and coaxing people to enter. Pictures of the things to be seen for five cents or ten cents hung beside the tents. A giant, a dwarf, a fat woman, an educated pig, a five-legged calf, and the Wild Man from Borneo. There was an awful picture

of this wild-eyed man. In his hairy hand he held the stump of the leg of a sailor. He had eaten the rest of the sailor, one inferred, since all that was left was the shoe by which he held the half-devoured leg on which there was even yet a good deal of sailor-looking trouser, and the flesh and bone that showed red and white, at the trouser top. It was only five cents to see the Wild Man, and both Rachel and Molly desired to spend the gratuity of the Aunt in looking at him. Grandfather reminded, no doubt, of the Prophet Ezekiel by the sight of the bone said "no"; he was tired, and they had seen enough. So he took them home.

The afternoon performance was over. People came out of the tent, — crowds of people. They did not look so fresh as when they went in. The Warrenders were really snappish when Rachel asked them if it had been a good show; they were too tired to be friendly. Lucy said it was very good, but that she would have seen more had she not been compelled to sit behind a fat woman with a very large hat. She had lost a good deal of the trapeze things, and the jumpings of the Queen of the Ring. She bore her misfortunes very well, better, perhaps, than she

would have done if her seat had not been so close to the monkey-cage.

Dick and Paul came home. They all but had "cricks" in their necks from trying to look everywhere at once. Paul had a headache. They had spent their five-cent pieces for pink lemonade, and Paul's had not agreed with him.

Tutu put all her different pieces of work into her basket. She had sewed a little on each piece, and felt that she had spent a profitable day. She also put in the empty pie-plates. She then put Daffy's hat on.

Rachel begged to stay over night.

"Oh, do!" cried Betty and Molly.

"Yes, Tutu, let the child stay," said Grandmother and the Aunts. So permission was given.

Rachel looked after Dick and Daffy with some regret. It seemed as if they might be going away to a far country, and that it might be years before they met.

"Give my love to Father and Mother," she called after them.

They played in the garden for a while. They dragged the sawhorse out of the woodshed, and impersonated the Queen of the Ring by turns.

While one child rode thereon the others pranced about astride of sticks. Rachel then wound a towel around another stick, and played at being the Wild Man from Borneo with such ferocity and fervor that Betty was frightened half out of her life. Then it was supper-time.

On Thursday night everybody who could go always went to Prayer-meeting. Grandfather always went, and made the second prayer. In it he asked God so fervently that his sins might be blotted out, that the children could not help wondering what he had done that was so bad. His was, however, a truly pious soul, and his prayers were the trustful speakings of a good man with his Best Friend.

The Aunts were going also. Grandmother was to stay at home and see that all went well. As the day had begun so early, it was decided to put the children to bed before the ladies went out.

Paul's head ached very much. The door of his room usually stood open, and when Rachel stayed over night, it was he who usually begged hardest for one of her stories, but to-night the door was closed. Rachel had a good memory, and from a constant study of *The Norse Tales*, *The Arabian Nights*, Miss Mulock's *Fairy Book*, and

Mr. Wind and Madame Rain she had a large and delightful *répertoire* of stories. The best time for stories is, as every one knows, after one has gone to bed; but to-night, as Paul did not even wish to hear about *The Master Thief*, she told it in whispers, so that he should not be kept awake by her voice. Molly dropped asleep before the story was ended, and after Betty had asked a few questions, why this, and why not that, she followed her into Dreamland.

It was not yet dark. The second performance of the Circus was about to begin. People were passing on the street under the window. The music began again. Rachel knew nothing of the evil of the great world, but it seemed as if something strange and uncanny lurked behind that palpitating, alluring, compelling breathing of those low-voiced wind instruments. Hers was a sensitive soul, and she felt ill at ease, she knew not why.

She grew more and more wretched, and the safe shelter of dear Mother's arms seemed far, far away. Why had she forsaken the sweet home nest? What if something dreadful should befall in the night, and she should never see her loved ones again?

She thought of her sins. How many and how black they were! Only this morning she had jerked her head angrily when Mother herself had brushed the snarls from her hair. Only this afternoon she had stamped her foot, and cried with rage, because she could not go to the Show. It was all very well to say that if any one was honestly sorry for being bad and asked the Heavenly Father to forgive He would do it. What Rachel's subjective little heart wanted was the comforting and forgiveness of the earthly mother.

She sat up in bed. The music panted and coaxed. Nobody was awake. She could bear it no longer.

She slipped quickly into her clothes. She took her shoes in her hand, and ran lightly down the stair. Grandmother was a little deaf, so she did not hear the soft turning of the front door key, or the gentle closing of the front door itself, or the slow click of the gate latch.

The little child who had never been alone with the night before was alone now.

She dared not venture across the Old Orchard, where, beside the lighted tents, many oil lamps flared. What if kidnappers should be about,

and she should be seized and flung into one of the dark wagons? O dear Lord, help a little girl to get home in safety to her mother!

Her feet flew over the walks of the Longest Way. Evil might be around her; evil was, but none happened to her. The Guardian Angels saw to that.

At last she stood before the door of Oak House, and for the first time in her life she rang its bell.

The Doctor was out on one of the errands of mercy that filled his life. Mary Baily had gone to vespers, and Tutu was in Prayer-meeting. The Doctor's Wife opened the door.

"Why, Rachel! what in the world is this?" she exclaimed.

"I couldn't stay away from you any longer, Mother," sobbed the child, throwing herself into the never failing arms. "I was afraid you would die in the night, and then you would never know how much I love you, and how sorry I am that I was so bad. It did hurt to have the snarls taken out of my hair, but I needn't have been so hateful."

After Prayer-meeting, the Aunts went up to look at the children. There was the dent in the

pillow where Rachel's head had been, but there was no Rachel. The Aunts were dumb with horror. What if —?

The Eldest Aunt was very matter-of-fact.

"She has run away, that is all, and is safe in her own bed. Of course, tired as we are, we must go down to Brother's and see. I do hope it's the last time that naughty child will ever be allowed to stay here all night. Even in daytime she is more than I can manage."

Yes, Rachel was safe in her own bed. Her arms were tossed above her head, and her face, rosy with sleep, was the face of a thoughtful little angel.

"Nobody would believe she could be so much trouble when she is awake," said the Eldest Aunt.

CHAPTER IV

Miss Timlow

Now there are only strangers in the Village; but then it was but rarely that one appeared, and it was a great day for Rachel when Fate wafted thither a being beauteous named Timlow — Miss Timlow.

Whence came she? Rachel never thought to ask. Like some splendid planet, some veritable Venus, she appeared, and straightway the mind of the little girl was filled with joyous excitement by day, and with whirling dreams by night, in which there was but one figure, so very, very beautiful were Miss Timlow and her clothes.

Miss Timlow had come to be a teacher in the Free School, and Rachel longed to become a pupil there. Prejudiced but powerful elders decreed that this was not to be, so it was only on Sundays, and by altering her own habits on that day, that Rachel could be absolutely sure of seeing her idol. Miss Timlow was a devout

church-goer, and, arrayed as Solomon never dreamed of being, and escorted by the young man to whom she was engaged to be married, she flooded the plain sanctuary with a glory it had never known before. It was wonderful !

Miss Timlow's lover was a tailor. His clothes were fine and gay. His hair, worn very long, curled over his white collar, and was scented with the most delicious hair-oil. Of that Rachel was sure, for she smelled it distinctly at the Sunday-school picnic where he was in attendance upon the fair object of their common devotion. None of the men whom Rachel knew used hair-oil, so it was evident that he must be a very superior person. His teeth were of a dazzling whiteness, and he showed them persistently. He was a truly beautiful young man, and quite worthy to walk beside the glorious Timlow when she went to Church of a Sunday morning.

Rachel became suddenly devout. She missed no service. She gave over making faces at Lucy ; she stopped asking the Doctor how soon the sermon would be over, — the sermon that could not now be too long, since she could spend all the time it lasted in the contemplation of Miss Timlow.

It was not a very exciting Church. The singers sat in a gallery over the doors, and one could not, with propriety, watch their various movements. The Pastor stood or sat on a high platform in front. He was a very learned and godly man, but did not seem to know that the little ones are as much a part of the church as are the ruling elders, and while he gave the strong men the strong meat they needed — never thought of holding forth a little cup of the Milk of the Word to the babes of the fold. If one were small and restless, therefore, after one had watched the families enter quietly, and take their seats in the pews; after one had noted the various changes made by Fall or Spring upon the bonnets and wraps of the ladies, there was nothing to do until the next turn of the seasons but to watch certain pendants on the chandeliers, and to calculate through which heads of the worshippers below they would pierce in case of an earthquake, and the consequent falling of the great gas-fixtures. One fat man, with a bald head, sat directly under the largest iron icicle-looking point, and would, beyond question, be the first victim. He slept all through the sermons. How dared he? Why

was he not awake, and praying to be delivered from the Bad Man, who would certainly get him if he died sleeping in Church. Rachel sat with thrills of horror creeping up her spine, waiting for the catastrophe which never came.

After the advent of Miss Timlow, she gave over imagining the fat man as pinned to his pew by the overhanging spike, and noted only the perfections of the beauty, to whom, luckily, a seat in a front pew was assigned. She was large and buxom, was Miss Timlow. Roses of the richest crimson bloomed upon her cheeks. Her bright eyes glittered under dark, meeting brows, and on her red, red lips a smile of conscious pride rested. Her hoops were of a size not attained by the modest crinoline of the ladies Rachel knew, and as she swept along on her French-heeled shoes, petticoats heavy with lace showed themselves. Around her neck were ruches, collars, ribbons, chains, upon her breast were laces, lappets, bugles, brooches. In her hair were combs, pins, puffs, curls, and crimps. It was in her bonnets that she was, however, above all mortals, splendid. What velvets and plumes! What blondes and laces! What ribbons and flowers and glorious, shining, twinkling things!

The world and the flesh in their most enticing form flaunted themselves in the eyes of the little maiden, and at last the other member of the famous trio began to whisper things that made her of all creatures the most miserable.

The singers sang the solemn hymns. The Pastor said the short prayer, and the long prayer, and preached the yet longer sermon. Then certain highly favored citizens arose and passed the plates for the collection, walking gravely up one aisle and down the next. Rachel quite forgot that it was her Sunday to stand at the pew door and drop the Doctor's contribution into the alms-basin, and she did not even notice that Dick had taken her place. She hardly knew when the doxology was sung, or when the heads were reverently bowed to receive the good man's blessing before the worshippers were free to turn their faces homeward with that cheerful sense of duty well done which always accompanies the end of a sermon.

"Come, Rachel," said her mother, taking the hot little palm in her own cool one. "You may tell Miss Sarah that you will not be in School this afternoon, for we are all going out to

Grandpa's for dinner. Why, what is the matter, child? Are you ill?"

No'm, Rachel was not ill. Yes'm, she wanted to go to Grandpa's, but mightn't she sit next dear Mother on the back seat, and not with Father on the front one? Let Dick help drive; she did not care if it was her Sunday to do so.

"The child is certainly ill," said the Doctor's Wife. "I never saw her so quiet before."

It was not an ill that any of the drugs the Doctor knew could cure. To a mind diseased, who can minister?

The days dragged slowly on. There was no joy in any of the schemes that Dick proposed or that Daffy devised. There was no charm in any of the games that Sophy Jane invented. There was no balm in the books she loved much, in the flowers she loved more, or in the tenderness of the parents she loved most of all. A weary, drooping little figure was hers, listless and heavy-eyed, dogged by the haunting evil who had suggested the horror from which there seemed no escape. In her blind, dim way poor Rachel tried to pray for help, but she felt that to sin this but added sacrilege, and so forbore.

The next Sunday was, if anything, worse.

Louder and louder whispered the mocking evil, blacker and blacker grew her sin. Miss Timlow, all unconscious, had donned a new bonnet. Tulle! with roses! Glass drops like diamonds hung from the rosy petals, and dripped over the puffs of lace that surmounted the puffs of hair. Wide strings, like films of dew-gemmed cobwebs, disposed themselves under her chin; and over her crimson cheeks her eyes glanced about proudly as the beautiful tailor waved a large pink feather fan to and fro for her refreshment. Never before had she been so splendid. It was terrible.

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. It could be borne no longer.

The bells rang out for Prayer-meeting — Ding-dong! Ding-dong! Ding-dong!

Tutu was beginning preparations pointing bedward. The Doctor's Wife was tying on her week-day bonnet.

"Mother, may I go with you?"

"Certainly not!" cried Tutu. "I never heard of such a thing!"

"Why do you wish to go, dear? You will get sleepy."

"Oh, Mother, let me go!"

"Just this once, Tutu," pleaded the second in command. "The little thing has been so strange lately I do not like to deny her."

So they fared out into the twilight, hand in hand, and presently were in the dimly lighted basement of the Church where Prayer-meeting was holding. The lights flared, but there were not enough of them to brighten the dark corners under the great beams which upheld the floor of the room above. There was a point of color in the red cushion on which the Word lay. The men and women who had assembled for the grave worship sang a few hymns, and the older men prayed, not, one would have thought, to a loving Father, who knew all the frailties of their dust, and who was love and mercy and tenderest pity, but to a great dread Judge and Sovereign, a jealous God, ever watchful to mark the secret sin of thought, ever ready to punish and avenge. Far, far better than their stern creed were those good men, good husbands, good fathers, good citizens, who poured out their petitions in the dusky basement on that warm May night.

Each word fell like a blow upon the tender little heart that ached in Rachel's breast. If

God were so fierce and grim, what hope could there be, here or hereafter, for such a sinner as she? Perhaps her heart was hardened as Pharaoh's had been, and there would be for her only a long life tormented by plagues, and an awful cataclysmal death! She could bear it no longer. She would be firm in her resolve to confess.

The door opened. In came the smiling tailor, wafting musky odors, and — woe unutterable! — in came Miss Timlow, more beautiful than ever before, in a black gown trimmed with much red, and with a red bow in a hat of the most astounding coquettishness.

Surely God had forgotten Rachel!

It was over at last. The Doctor's Wife waited for Sophy Jane's parents. Now that they had confessed themselves to be vile worms and miserable sinners, they and the Pastor and everybody else were cheerful human beings once more, who would wrong no man by word or deed, and who found their little corner of the great world a most pleasant place to dwell in. In friendly converse they stopped a moment at the corner, and then dispersed through the quiet streets, where the moonlight lay in great floods

of silver, painting the shadows of the maples in wide washes of gray and black.

Rachel held tightly to her mother's hand. Every step was bringing the fatal moment nearer, and in the wild whirl of her pain she could hardly wait until they should be alone. At last, the last neighbor had said "good night."

"Mother —" the little voice began.

"Yes, Rachel."

"Mother, I have something to tell you."

"Yes, dear. Mother is listening."

"But it is very awful."

"Oh! I hope not. But even if it is, Mother is the best one to tell it to."

"I don't see how I can. It is so very bad. Worse than anything you ever heard of."

"Go on, dear."

"It is so bad that I know you can never love me any more; but, oh, Mother, I cannot help it."

"Nothing can ever make me stop loving my own little daughter. What is this awful thing?"

"Oh, how can I tell it? I am so ashamed! I prayed to God, but He did not help me. I could not help myself — indeed I could not."

"My child, you alarm me!"

"It will be worse than alarm when you hear.

You will never be able to forgive me. Maybe I'll have to go away and earn my own living, — or beg."

"Oh, no, Rachel. Go on."

"Mother! Mother! I cannot help it, but, dearest Mother, I do think Miss Timlow is prettier than you are!"

So the awful secret was out, and the awful tragedy was over. When the word was spoken, the obsession ended; and the child, quieted and restored by the sympathy of the mother, whose amused smiles the friendly shadows hid, walked happily on. When they entered their own door and the lamplight fell on the delicately moulded features of the mother's high-bred face, on the bright ripples of her hair, and the deep beauty of her large dark eyes, the scales fell from the wide blue eyes of the little girl. The world and the flesh had lost, the spirit had won, and the evil had gone forever as she clasped her arms about the neck of the one who stood in the place of God to her, crying:—

"Oh, Mother, it isn't true! It never was true at all! Miss Timlow — why, Miss Timlow is *ugly!*"

CHAPTER V

What might have been Expected

EXCEPT during the brief and tragic reign of Miss Timlow, Rachel's thoughts had never wandered from their loyalty to the most beautiful and beloved of mothers. Had they done so, beyond question they had chosen to be one of the children at the Last Farm.

Perhaps it was not really the last farm of the beautiful, bountiful country-side, but as it lay on the outermost verge of Rachel's world, it bore that distinction in her mind. Why should there be more of a world than enough, and who could have wished for greater felicity than fell to the lot of those happy children whose lives were spent in and about the rambling old farmhouse, whose two front doors were but a symbol of the wide hospitality which would gladly have welcomed all mankind to a share in its homely comfort?

Every one knows that mothers are of many sorts. Some have a great many more rules than others, and it must be owned that, in the eyes of the younger sort at the Village, mothers were rated according to the number and strictness of these. The mother at Last Farm seemed to have no rules at all, and it was small matter for wonder that as many little guests as might be crowded around her table, year in and year out. She had a most perfect appreciation of the things that make for the happiness of little people, who, in turn, rewarded her with the most lavish affection. One might eat what one liked in her orchard or garden, for she never in the least minded getting up at any hour of the night to administer the corrective paregoric. One might play out in the rain or before the dew was dried from the grass, since she had plenty of rather good-tasting syrups for colds, as well as all sorts of soothing balms for cuts and bruises. There were always jars of ginger crackers and fat doughnuts in her pantry — which had no key; and, unlike all other known mothers, she felt that the children were never safer than when they sat astride of the horses turned loose in the meadow, or when playing about in

the fragrant grasses of the haymow. The one thing she lacked was the power to forbid or curtail the happiness of the young things about her, and it was therefore a matter of course that she should be Aunt Em'ly to everybody who knew her.

Rachel was asked to pay a visit to the Last Farm children. She was to go on Monday and to return with the family, which was invited to spend the afternoon and have supper on Wednesday. It was to be a very large tea-party; the Grandparents, nearly all of the Uncles and Aunts, all the visitors from Boston, a great many cousins, were asked, as well as a few very particular friends. Two tables were to be set in the orchard for the Grown-ups, and the children were to have games under the pine trees until a second table could be laid for them. Everybody anticipated a most delightful time, and Rachel nearly lost her mind from joy when Aunt Em'ly asked her for the extra day.

Before breakfast on Monday her wardrobe was packed in a large valise. Tutu did this early, because, she said, she had not had a profitable Sabbath on account of Rachel's frettings lest she should not be ready on time, and

now that Monday had come she wished to have it done and over with. Tutu was to go to the Wednesday tea-party also, and would assist in waiting on the tables.

It seemed as if the farm wagon would never stop at Oak House door, but it did come at last, and Rachel climbed up beside the driver. Dick and Daffy stood at the gate, looking wistfully after her as the slow horses trotted off down the street. The little girl turned and called "Good-by" until she could be heard no longer; and after that there were so many sights to see in the deep woods and pleasant lanes through which she passed, that it was no time at all before the horses had turned in at their own barnyard gate, and the children trooped out to welcome the newcomer. There was one extra child,—one of the Boston boys,—a very nice boy.

It was hard to know what to do first, when so many delights stood at hand with ready ministry, but clearly the most important thing was to get rid of shoes and stockings. The Doctor's Wife had tried to give as many directions for Rachel's conduct as she could think of, but she had forgotten to forbid bare feet, and although Miss knew her opinion on the subject perfectly, there

was a little pile of discarded foot-gear on the floor of the children's room directly. After that there was a perfect riot of fun, until suddenly it was night, and the large moon was looking through the pine trees at three little white figures climbing into the big bed. Outside katydids were accusing and insinuating, crickets were chirring, and all the sounds of a hot Summer night were filling the air.

Rachel was like an owl. Her eyes got bigger as night came on, and her fancies quickened as darkness deepened. At home, talking after prayers was forbidden, and besides, one was listening to Tutu's strident voice, reading out the old Hebraic histories. Here were keen listeners and no prohibitory rules, so Rachel began to spin out her tales.

The boy from Boston had the next room. He could hear her voice through the closed door.

"What are you talking about?" he called.

"Rachel's telling stories."

"What kind? Girl stories?"

"No, splendid ones. Out of *Arabian Nights*."

"Well, wait. I will pull my bed off on the floor, by the door-crack, and then if she will holler a little I can hear."

So Rachel "hollered."

In the still moonlight it was easy enough to believe in the spirits and genii, the robbers and murderers, of the old Oriental imaginings, and it was not long before the little girls were wrought up to the highest tension by the terrors she related. The boy from Boston had read the stories for himself, so he soon left off listening and went to sleep. He had had a very busy day. He had trapped two gophers and had tanned their skins.

The three heads were all under the sheet now, and all the hands were clutched at each other in fascinated horror as Rachel told on. More and more terrible grew the adventures of her characters, brighter and brighter shone the moonlight, deeper and deeper fell the pine-tree shadows, louder and sadder grew the voices of the night. An owl began its shuddering cry. There was a rustling sound in the room itself, a low, stealthy sound.

What if — ?

There was certainly Somebody or Something strange in the room.

Rachel was an arrant coward.

"You look out, Mary; you're the oldest —"

she whispered, pulling the sheet tighter over her head.

Mary waived the honors of her age.

"Only two weeks older'n you," she reasoned.

"Two weeks is a good deal."

"Well, I ain't going to look, if it is," said Mary.

"You, Em'ly. You're on the outside."

"And be caught first? No, ma'am!"

"There it is again. Oh, I wish I was home!"

"Whatever it is, you brought it on yourself, Miss Rachel," said Mary, ungratefully, but in a most distinct voice. "Nobody'd ever catch me talking as bad as you do 'bout those — Creatures. I 'spect they're very nice, good Folks, and the old stories are all lies. They've no call to be cross at *me*, anyhow, for *I* wasn't the one to tell mean things about Them."

This vindication Rachel felt to be unjust. Mary had been the one to clamor loudest for the stories; and as Rachel had merely repeated what she had read in a printed book, and felt herself in no wise personally responsible for her literary material, she would have liked to argue these points with Mary; but as Em'ly was almost choking her, she could not do so. The

erie sounds continued intermittingly. So did the boding cry of the owl.

Rachel thought of prayer; but danger seemed too imminent for any but the most immediate action.

"Let's all screech together," she advised. "If we screech hard enough, some one will be sure to come."

No wonder some one came. The triplicate screech would have awakened the Seven Sleepers.

Aunt Em'ly appeared as if by magic. In one hand she held a candle and the bottle of paregoric; in the other, a strip of old linen and the Pond's Extract.

The mysterious noises were accounted for. The terrier puppy had crept surreptitiously upstairs, and was making his uneasy bed on the little gowns cast untidily into the corner.

The next thing that happened was morning. It was raining, a most inopportune rain. In honor of the little kinsman from Boston, the Grand-aunt who lived at Locust Lane had bidden the children to spend the day with her; and even as Locust Lane was no everyday place, so a visit thither was no everyday affair, and the patter of

the rain upon the roof was a most unwelcome sound. Perhaps it might leave off before noon.

Yes ; before noon the rain had changed into a warm, soft mist. The children decided that there was no need for them to forego the visit. The boy from Boston had a pair of tall rubber boots, and Rachel had her blue parasol, so they felt equal to anything. The things for the next day's feast were preparing, so Aunt Em'ly and the elder daughters were only too glad to have the children out of their way, to think of offering objections. The procession set forth.

The road could hardly have been worse. The rain had churned the deep prairie soil into a black batter. The Boston boy splashed on through the deepest puddles. The little girls hopped enviously along, choosing the least bad of the stepping-places.

"We could walk on the fence ; sidewise, you know," suggested Mary. "I wish we were all gophers, then we could cut along like anything."

But they were not gophers, and therefore they cut along on the Virginian fence at a rate which promised but ill for their prospects of dinner. Then a hedged field intervened, and they were forced to take to the road again.

It was very unfortunate, but Rachel dropped her parasol into the ditch. She was greatly attached to the parasol, and in her distress she flung herself on her knees to recover it. After that there was no need to be careful of anything, and seeing her skipping gayly along, the Last Farm children forgot their clean raiment, closed their umbrellas, and followed suit. The rest of the journey was delightful, and they arrived at the farmstead of Locust Lane in high spirits.

The Grand-aunt met them at the door; her face became pale with horror. *These* her nieces! *That* her nephew! Her placid existence had been invaded by no element so foreign for many a long year. She hastily closed the door behind her, and stood where the gray mist touched her gray curls. Her delicate old hand trembled as she pointed toward the woodshed.

"Go in there," she quavered. "Sit down on clean logs, and scrape off the mud with chips. I think, I certainly do think, that no shoes and stockings at all would be less dangerous than those you have on. They are wringing wet."

This the children already knew. A little abashed, they filed into the orderly shed and took off their shoes. They felt the frank hunger

of the young animal, and they now began to wonder if any dinner would be given them. The Grand-aunt's neatness was proverbial; it was not probable that they would be permitted to sit in her nice dining room.

After a very long time she came out, stepping daintily and swiftly, and followed by her old servant-woman. The Grand-aunt carried a large armful of yellowed muslins and old-time prints. Hannah had a large basin, some towels and soap.

"Go up into the loft with Hannah, Thomas," said the old gentlewoman, sternly, "and put on exactly what she gives you without a word. Let me hear no word of rebellion. Mary — Rachel — Emily, take off your aprons."

Fifty years before there had been a little daughter at the old farmhouse; a daughter grown, married, and "gone West," so far away and so long before that even her name was not known to the children's generation. A box of her clothing stood in the room so long vacant, sacredly treasured by the fond mother, who lifted it out reverently, sometimes, and conjured up the little figure that had once drifted like sunshine through the quiet rooms. It was now a real

pain to her to see the garments desecrated — but duty was duty.

Rachel looked at Mary; she looked at Em'ly; she looked at herself, and broke into a loud wail of angry protest.

"I'd rather be soaked to the skin, and mud to the eyes, than dressed up in these old rags," she screamed. "The ruffles on the petticoats scratch my legs, and I can't breathe with such a tight dress on! You said you'd like to be a gopher, Mary; you'd wish it more than ever if you could see yourself now! I am not going to stand it! I shall go home this minute!"

The stairway creaked, and Tom descended, followed by the grim Hannah. His face was scarlet, his lips were pressed tightly together, his eyes blazed with rage. His trim knickerbockers had given place to a garment of nankeen muslin, yellow and frilled, — an unmistakable skirt; and instead of his pretty blouse, he was compassed about by the purple, knitted folds of a woollen joseph. Rachel's wrath gave way to a peal of laughter as the Grand-aunt fled houseward.

"You can play in the barn," said Hannah, angrily; "I'll fetch your dinner out; but the

house isn't a place for the likes of you." Hannah also departed.

"I'm glad we did get muddy," said the adaptable Rachel. "We'll have a heap better time than we'd have had sitting up prim in the parlor, looking at picture books. We can play we're shipwrecked, and the barn is a desert island for us to explore. Unbutton my back, Mary; I'll pop open if you don't."

It was an ideal barn — vast and dim in the gray light. Up in the world of dusty rafters and glancing motes, the swallows had plastered their untidy nests, and the air seemed filled with whirling wings. In and out of the open windows flitted tiny flycatchers with their lonesome little cries. The great church-going rockaway stood in a corner beyond the little everyday cart, and the Great-uncle's saddle, and the queer old side-saddle on which the Grand-aunt had made the great *hegira* half a century before; bridles, bits of old rope and chain, dusty old buffalo-skin robes, the red sleigh, and the ropes of bells that belonged to Winter, — these were all to be found in the sleepy old barn; where there was, moreover, a mow of hay to slide on, and bins of slippery oats and golden ears of corn

guarded by half-wild cats, now scurrying to safe shelter among the beams, whence their golden-topaz eyes glared fiercely down at the strange-looking invaders. Ah, that was a barn indeed!

Everything had been explored but a barrel in a corner. A lid was on it, and on the lid lay four old horseshoes. It would be a pity not to know what was in the barrel.

Off came the lid, and out flew a hen, which fell exhausted on the floor.

Tom picked her up. Her eyes closed weakly. It was hardly possible that a hen could be so very thin.

Here was a tragedy.

The children stood in the barn door and screamed for help.

The house door opened and Tom held up the little hen.

"We found her in an old barrel," he shouted; "she's nearly dead."

The Grand-aunt crossed the lane quickly, and took the poor hen in her arms. She burst into tears.

"I shut her up to keep her from sitting," she said, "and I forgot her. It was over a week ago. I can never forgive myself. Oh, Speckle, if you

will only live, you may do just whatever you please, and never, never shall your head be cut off ! ”

With unwonted tears lying on her fair old cheeks, she carried Speckle tenderly over to the house. It had been a most trying day, and she felt quite spent. The children looked at each other.

“ I’m sorry for Speckle, but I ain’t sorry for the Grand-aunt,” said Rachel, spitefully. “ People who make such fusses about a little clean dirt and dress their company up like scarecrows deserve to be punished. You needn’t say ‘ Shame ! ’ Tom, for I *am* glad, and if you saw yourself, you’d be glad too. I bet Dick wouldn’t let any old Hannah make a girl out of him ! ”

The rain and mist gave place to sunshine, and by four o’clock Hannah had all the soiled clothing nicely washed and ironed and dried. The cakes were all baked, and Aunt Em’ly and the elder daughters, in fresh gowns, were sitting out under the pine trees when the quartet returned.

“ Wonders will never cease ! ” said the older daughter, looking up from her book. “ You have been gone all day, and you come home as clean as you went.”

“ Yes’m,” said the children.

The tea-party day dawned bright and still. The rain had come on again a few hours before dawn; but when the sun rose, it seemed as if every particle of dust had been washed away from the fresh and lovely world, that smiled and dimpled, and shook the pearls and diamonds from its leafy coronal, as a fair young goddess might have done. No one could have believed the world to be as old as it really is.

The tea-party people were to come early, so there would be a long afternoon for social enjoyment. It was hoped that by three o'clock the last guest would have arrived. By one o'clock the tables were laid. The young ladies had trimmed them beautifully with cool ferns and delicate trails of creeping plants and misty grasses from the woods and fields. The flowers in the garden were left to be admired where they were growing, and then all the late-blooming roses and asters were to be cut for the friends to carry home with them. There was to be another surprise. Each guest was to be presented with a watermelon. It was not Aunt Em'ly's idea of hospitality to let any one go empty-handed from her door. The watermelons were cooling luxuriously in the ice-house already.

Before they donned their own dainty ribbons and muslins, the elder daughters dressed the children. Mary and Em'ly hardly knew themselves in the embroidered frocks reserved strictly for Sunday wear, and Rachel was more than pleased to find that Tutu had put her favorite gown in the bottom of the valise. It had little pink rosebuds scattered over it in a very artistic manner. All had on their best slippers, and were carefully warned against mussing or crumpling their clothes.

"Do you think it is safe to let them go downstairs?" asked one of the young ladies.

"Why not?"

"I do not feel uneasy about Mary and Em'ly, but Rachel is always full of schemes that end in disaster."

"There isn't any danger," comforted the other sister. "They are going to sit on the carriage block, and watch for the company."

It was very pleasant on the carriage block, which stood on the grassy space before the gate, and which was itself made of some sections of old trees, over which gray and olive lichens were painting soft harmonies of color and texture. The shadows of the locust trees flickered daintily

over the heads of the little girls. It was very still, and nothing could be seen down the long straight road.

Across the way a patch of burdocks grew luxuriant. They were covered with green and purple blossom-heads.

"See that splendid burdock," said Rachel. "If we had a lot of those burs, we could make some baskets while we wait. I believe I'll make one for Mother. She loves baskets."

"It's wet over there."

"Oh, not much wet. I can get them easily enough."

It was not much wet, for the ditch which drained the roadbed did not begin until after the burdocks had ended. Rachel returned to the carriage block in safety, her skirts held bag-wise, full of the fascinating burs.

The basket was a failure. No company was in sight.

"I could make us wreaths," proposed Rachel. "Lovely ones. Let me try on you, Mary."

Mary held back.

"It's bad enough having snarls brushed out of my hair now," she argued, "let alone having old burdocks stuck into it."

“Well, you, Em’ly.”

“I don’t want to.”

“Are you a ’Fraid cat, too?” taunted Rachel.

“No, I ain’t any ’fraider ’n you are; but I’m not going to have my hair pulled out with those things.”

“Well, I am, then,” said Rachel, beginning her wreath. “I’ve always wished I could be a Queen of the May, or a princess and wear a crown, and now I’m going to make believe this is a most splendid crown, with emeralds and amethysts. I wish I had long golden ringlets like yours, Mary. A crown will look some funny on my short hair, but I can make believe I’ve ringlets, too. See, now!”

Short as her hair was, there was plenty of grappling-ground for the sharp spines of the burdock. She had put the crown on a little askew, — the point of the diadem was decidedly to the left of her nose.

Rachel’s imagination was fired. She took off her slippers and stockings.

“I’m the Princess Barefoot,” she announced. “My enchanted crown is invisible, and I’ve got to wander about the world, and have adventures

until I meet the Real Prince, and when he sees me, he will see my crown also, and I shall be restored to my kingdom and marry my deliverer."

She started off down the road.

"Don't! You'll get dirty!" cried the little girls.

"Only my feet," she called over her shoulder.

"I am going to wade in the ditch a little."

"Sisters told you not to."

"They said I was to keep my dress clean. They never mentioned feet."

The thick black mud oozed deliciously between her little pink toes and about her ankles. Her skirts were very short. There could be no harm in venturing a little farther down the ditch. Mary could pump on her feet when she got out. One might as well have a little fun, now and then.

The ditch was deeper than she had thought. She clutched at her skirts. Oh, it was very deep! Perhaps it had no bottom at all, and she would sink and sink, clear through the awful fire in the middle of the earth, and come out feet foremost in China, where she knew nobody. Should she never see her dear ones again? Why,

oh, why had she left the safe carriage block on which the Last Farm children stood, clean and anxious?

A sumach branch hung over the black water. The little skirts were forgotten. There was a mad dash for life, a scramble, and Rachel stood safe upon the highway, a very pitiful little princess indeed.

"Hurry up!" shrilled the little girls. "Your grandpa's carriage is almost here. They're bringing the Aunts from Boston."

Grandma was hardly the person Rachel cared to meet just then. She lingered behind the sumach shelter until the ladies had alighted and old Robin was driven into the barnyard.

How was she to get unseen to the house, and what was she to do after she got there?

"Here comes your father," piped the little sisters on the watch-tower. "And your mother, and Dick, and Daffy, and Tutu."

Rachel's adventures had evidently begun. The moment was of the blackest, but it had to be faced, and somehow she lived through it.

Tutu said the Doctor spoiled Rachel. Perhaps he did; for instead of administering the rebuke she had so richly earned, he laughed both loud

and long. Dick was, therefore, free to laugh also.

The Doctor's Wife grew pale with mortification and distress.

Little Daffy began to cry.

Tutu scrambled down over the wheels. She held a large parcel in her arms.

"Come straight down to the stable, Rachel," she ordered. "I knew you'd bring some sort of disgrace upon the family, and I thought if clean clothes would save it, clean clothes I'd bring. Thanks be to praise I've got my scissors in my work-bag, for every one of those burs'll have to be cut out of your hair, by main strength and awkwardness. Come along."

The older tea-party people sat in the shadow of the fragrant murmuring pine trees, enjoying the sweetness of the afternoon and the pleasures of agreeable society. The young ladies flitted about like lovely white butterflies. The young men were all gallantry and devotion. The children played about everywhere. Aunt Em'ly's elder daughters were putting the last touches to the tables in the orchard.

"I really am puzzled about something," said one of these. "I was sure we put a gown with

pink rosebuds on it on Rachel, yet there she is, figuring away in a blue chambray. I wonder what it means, and I do wonder what *is* the matter with her hair."

"I haven't time for wonder," said the other ;
"but that is a dreadful child."

CHAPTER VI

Having the Congressman to Tea

CULTURE was not spelled with a capital letter in the Village. The men did not think that the salvation of the whole world lay in its adoption of their particular views, and none of the women belonged to a club; but there was culture of the highest type in the unpretentious homes where they lived and read and thought. Few of them had overlong purses; their lives were full of simple everyday duties; but their outlooks were wide, their sympathies generous, and their response to anything which appealed to their high ideals quick and sure. Engravings of the best pictures hung on their walls, and well-worn copies of the best books stood on their shelves. Their manners were without pretence, their speech pure, and their lives were like their English — simple, direct, and unpolluted.

Into the little circle composed of such people as these there came, now and then, persons

of distinction from the great outer world. It was in the palmy days of the lecture lyceums that Rachel lived, and great poets, great philosophers, great orators, and great soldiers were more than once heard in the old hall, which, even were it still standing, could never hope to hear such voices again. Such men were never permitted to go to the taverns, but were entertained at the home of this or that hospitable citizen. Little parties, small suppers or breakfasts, or bountiful midday dinners were made in honor of visiting celebrities, and in that way a great deal of the best society was seen by those who, without any arrogance on their own part, or detraction or envy on the part of others, were known as the best people.

There was a political campaign that Fall, and the Congressman was coming to make a speech. He was really a great man, honored from sea to sea, and as he and the Doctor and the Doctor's Wife had, in a way, grown up together, he was to stay over night at the Oak House, as was his frequent habit, and a few of his oldest friends were to come and drink tea with him in the good old-fashioned way. His young wife had been long dead, and he had no children; but he loved the

little friends, and they loved him. He remembered their names, and never insulted them by calling them "Bub" or "Sissy." People who are really nice never forget children's names, and people who will say "Bub" and "Sissy" never have any dear little silver three-cent pieces in their pockets, and never show one, on the tablecloth, how the mice run. The Congressman always did, and Rachel had two three-cent pieces of his bestowal in her best box.

There was, as has been said, company asked to tea: Sophy Jane's father and mother; the Great-uncle, who was a judge, and his wife; the Great-aunt who had lived in Paris; the Minister and his pretty wife; the other Judge, who would be sure to be late, even though his wife were asked also; a lawyer who was a bachelor; a pretty girl cousin who was engaged to the bachelor; and Miss Emily, who sang so well; two, four, six, eight, ten, twelve, fourteen, when the host and hostess were counted in. The Doctor was sorry he could not ask more; but the Village knew the limitations of each dining room, and nobody was offended at being left out.

The Congressman was to come on Wednesday. The public speaking would begin at eight o'clock,

so supper would be served promptly at six. In order that the Other Judge should be there on time, he was asked for quarter-past five.

On Monday the washing was out on the clothes-line at the earliest possible hour. It was a good drying day, and by night many of the larger pieces were ironed. Tutu helped.

On Tuesday the ironing was finished bright and early. The little garments, fresh and sweet, aired on the bars beside the stove. The best table-cloth and napkins had been beautifully laundered, and the snowdrops on them fairly shone with the excellence of the polish given them. Towels enough to last any Congressman for a week were laid aside for use in his chamber, and there were fresh covers for everything that could possibly be covered. It was ten o'clock before all this was done.

Then began the real preparations: chickens were to be plucked, cake was to be made, citron was to be sliced, raisins were to be stoned, orange rinds were to be grated, lemon juice was to be squeezed, sugar was to be sifted. Everything smelled of spice—the kitchen was fairy-land.

Dick hated doing errands, and really, when he

had so many important things of his own to attend to after school hours, it was not fair of Tutu to save up so many for him. On Tuesday he came in at noon, and asked if there was anything he could do. To look at Dick's eyes no one would have supposed that he knew he would get a handful of raisins.

Rachel ran all the way home from school. Her stockings were down, and she had lost the note the German teacher had given her for her mother. She did not really do it on purpose, though Fraulein Bertha had distinctly said before the whole class that if Rachel's exercises were marked *sehr schlecht* twice, and *sehr schlecht* with an understroke once more, she should be reported. She had noted the thick black stroke under the usual *sehr schlecht* that day, so she knew what was in the note; but she had honestly meant to bring it home. Rachel was an honest child.

Daffy was too little to be sent to school, so she had stayed all the morning with Tutu in the kitchen. A clean shingle laid on a chair, a lump of cake dough, an old thimble, and her toy rolling-pin had kept her busy and quiet. She kneaded and moulded and rolled and cut, then she recon-

sidered, and kneaded again. By the time morning was over, the gold-colored dough had assumed the hue of the richest fruit cake. Still Daffy rolled and cut.

Rachel went up to her.

"Did Tutu make us any little cup-cakes?" she whispered.

"I don't know," said Daffy; "I was busy."

Sophy Jane and Jimmy arrived. With the freedom of long-assured friendship, they followed their noses around to the back door, which was standing open for the sake of air.

"Hey-oh," said Sophy Jane and Jimmy.

"Hey-oh," replied the resident children.

Sophy Jane and Jimmy came in.

Dick opened his sticky hand and displayed the raisins.

Jimmy helped himself.

Rachel had nothing to offer. She looked at Sophy Jane; she looked at Tutu. Tutu was beginning to frown.

Rachel steered close to Mary Baily. Mary was Rachel's intimate friend.

"I think Mother'd be pleased if you offered Sophy a bite of that citron," she suggested; "the side that's got the most sugar on it."

"I'm doubtin' if she'd be so plazed as ye might think," said Mary Baily, dryly. "But I'll tell ye a saycret. Yer grandpa was here awhile back,—th' Lord love him, for a kind ould man!—an' he fetched a basket o' grand little pears. 'For th' childer,' says himself, that's got the good heart in him. Slip by, Rachel, darlint, an' give Sophy an' th' rist th' wink, an' ye'll find th' baskit behinst th' hall door."

Rachel squeezed her hand. "I love you, Mary," she said.

It was a very busy day. Synod was coming, and the Mission Band had to have an extra meeting. The Doctor's Wife and Tutu both belonged to the Mission Band. The extra meeting was set for Tuesday afternoon at four o'clock.

The children came home from school. Sophy Jane and Jimmy came also. There were more pears in the basket. Bartlett pears are not good keeping pears.

The house was perfectly quiet. Daffy had been taken to the Mission Band. Mary Baily loved a bit of garden, and she was planting daffodil bulbs along the path that bordered the

strawberry bed. The kitchen was dark and clean.

"When I was here this morning," began Sophy Jane, mysteriously, "I saw a new chopping bowl; I've thought of some fun."

The rest were all attention. Sophy Jane always thought of the best things.

"We'd better do it in the dining room," she said prudently. "There's a carpet there, and it won't make so much noise. It's going to be splendid, and it's entirely my own think-up. Since the beginning of the world nobody has ever played it before. This is going to be its very first time. Dick, you get the bowl."

Dick got the bowl. It was very large, and quite new. Tutu wanted it to make chopped pickle in.

"Put it down on the floor," commanded Sophy Jane.

He put it down. Sophy shoved it nearer to the table. She measured distances with her eye. Then she shoved it farther off. Too far. She pulled it back a little.

"Take off the table-spread, Rachel."

It was tossed into the corner, a crumpled heap of red.

"Now I will go first," explained Sophy Jane, mounting to the top of the table nimbly, and making her speech from thence as from a pulpit. "The game is this: we are to jump by turns from the table into the chopping bowl. Me first, then Jim, then Dick, and Rachel last. The thing is not to upset the bowl and fall out. The one that doesn't will get the prize."

"What's the prize?" asked Jimmy.

"I have not decided," said Sophy Jane; "but something splendid."

"The pearl butterfly?" the question trembled on Rachel's lips. She hoped so; she hoped not. How dreadful it would be if one of those boys should get it! Boys are so good at jumping, she felt that she had no chance against them, yet she was eager to try. To fail would be to lose it forever; it was a crucial moment.

The pearl butterfly was the rod of iron Sophy Jane held over Rachel's head. It was a large flake of mother-o'-pearl, cut into the shape of a butterfly. It had a bit of party-colored chenille twisted to form a body and *antennæ*; it was poised on a thread of wire, and had once hovered over the flowers on Sophy Jane's best hat. The hat was long since a thing of the past, but the

butterfly reposed in the bureau drawer. Rachel longed with all her soul to possess it. Sophy Jane cared nothing for it, but much for the power it gave her over her playmate. A conditional promise, a threatened withdrawal, a covert insinuation of a resolve to keep it forever and ever, or, in extreme moments, an announced determination to break it to atoms — these were Sophy Jane's mightiest weapons in the subjugation of her slave.

Sophy Jane looked at her critically.

"No ; something else."

Rachel drew a long breath. Danger was over ; the chance of final possession was only postponed.

Sophy Jane lifted her arms.

"One ! Two ! Three !"

Her legs were long ; she was very active, but the bowl upset.

Jimmy next.

The bowl upset again. Jimmy was very fat, so he was not hurt.

Then Dick tried.

Failure number three. Tenure of life in a bowl is most uncertain.

Rachel last.

She breathed hard, she squeezed her knees

together, she shut her eyes and launched forth into space. She did not even touch the bowl.

Over and over, faster and faster, they scrambled and jumped and fell. Nobody minded bumps; everybody was eager for his turn, and as yet no one had won the game. Rachel's head ached from the contusion that was swelling on her forehead, her elbow was skinned, and she tore her frock. Like mænads drunk with pleasure, they pursued their wild sport.

The door opened. Their mothers had walked down the street from the Mission Band, and Sophy Jane's mother had stopped to look at the new dining-room wall-paper. They looked instead at the four madly jumping children, — hot, torn, dishevelled, scarlet, and wild-eyed. They looked at the overturned chairs, the crumpled table-cloth, and the rocking chopping bowl. Daffy began to cry.

"This looks like your work, Sophia," began one mother.

"Rachel! —" said the other mother.

"No'm, Mother's right," owned Sophy Jane. "I made up the game. Nobody's hurt much 'cept Rachel's head."

"You may beg Mrs. Doctor's pardon, and go

straight home. Both of you," said Sophy Jane's mother. "Study your geography lesson, Sophia, and then go to bed."

Wednesday was the day for the tea-party. The Congressman was coming on the half-past four train, and supper was to be ready at six.

Vases of pretty autumnal flowers stood about in the parlor where a cheerful wood fire was burning, for the October evenings were cool. In the Mother's room the best bed-things adorned the bed on which the ladies were to lay their wraps. Two oil lamps stood in front of the looking-glass by which they were to arrange their hair. The best pin-cushion was set out.

In the dining room the table was laid for fourteen. The snowdrop linen was as smooth as satin, the white china shone; the best silver and glass sparkled. There were to be chickens and mashed potatoes and cabbage salad. There were to be hot biscuit and both white and brown loaf bread. There were to be pickles and jelly and honey. There were to be coffee and tea. Then Mary Baily and Tutu were to take off these things, and preserves, floating-island, and

all kinds of cake were to be passed. The cakes, on tall glass standards and in delicate silver baskets, stood on the side table where places were arranged for the children. The floating-island, in its tall glass bowl, was surrounded by fourteen of the dearest little custard cups. It looked most delicious; it was;—everything was. Balancing the dish of custards stood another dish holding preserved pears.

The children were dressed betimes. Tutu saw to that—best shoes and all. They were instructed as to their behavior, and sent to look out of the front-room window.

The Congressman was upstairs,—then he came down. He patted Dick on the shoulder, and pulled Rachel's ear; but little Daffy he lifted in his arms and carried into the parlor. By the fire sat all the guests, except the Other Judge and his wife. It was now quarter-past five, so he might be expected at any moment; but he had still three-quarters of an hour of grace.

Tutu and Mary Baily were in the kitchen. The dining room was closed; only one lamp burned there, and it was turned a little low.

Dick and Rachel went into the dining room.

Everything looked delicious;—everything was.

They looked to see if any frosting had cracked off any of the cakes ;—none had. They thought this a pity—a great pity. They were fond of frosting.

Dick stuck his finger into the floating-island, and licked it off with rapture.

“Oh, do let me have a lick!” begged Rachel. She whispered.

“I can’t; it’s gone,” Dick whispered also.

“The pears look nice,” observed Rachel. She stood near the pears.

“They do so,” assented Dick. “There seem to be a great many of them.”

“There are.”

Conversation flagged. Rachel stood a little nearer to the pears.

“I wonder if they have begun to spoil,” said Rachel. “Some did,—last Winter. Mother’d be mortified to offer spoiled pears to company.”

“She would so,” Dick was sure of that.

“She’d be glad to know in time if they really had.”

Yes, there was no doubt of that.

“In my ’pinion we’d better make sure,” Rachel whispered again.

“Maybe we had.”

No ;—Rachel’s had not spoiled, neither had

Dick's. There were a great many in the dish as Dick had observed — more than could possibly be eaten after all those other good things. Grown people never save up room inside as children wisely do. They even eat bread when they're invited out.

"I shouldn't call it stealing if we each took one more," said Rachel, the casuist. "They're our own mother's pears. A body'd think she'd rather her own children ate them instead of strangers."

Dick hung back. "No, not stealing — exactly."

"Anyhow, I'm going to have another, and maybe another after that," said Rachel, firmly, helping herself to a pear with a finger curved like a fish-hook. "Have some, Dick. It looks so selfish in me to be eating all these elegant pears by myself. Don't drop any juice on the table-cloth."

Time flies when one is feasting. It was half-past five. The tall clock struck; the door-bell rang. The Other Judge was come at last.

Rachel looked at the preserve dish. Then she looked at Dick. Then they both went into the dark front room and looked out of the window.

The door from the kitchen opened, then the door from the parlor opened also. Tutu and the Doctor's Wife were in consultation. The parlor door was opened again, the Doctor was called out.

In a moment he came to the front-room door.

"Rachel!" he called. His voice was quiet — very quiet.

"I'm here, too, sir," said Dick.

CHAPTER VII

An Affliction in the Family

THERE was heavy sorrow in the Old House beyond the Old Orchard. A Presence, still and terrible, had been knocking at the door for many days. Loving hands had tried to bar his quiet footsteps, but in vain. He had passed up the wide stair, and had tapped softly at the door of the Youngest Aunt, who was a widow. She had been a widow ever since the children had known her, which had not been so very long, for she had lived in the far West, and had only come home because of the black veil she wore. She was a delicate, frail girl, worn with grief; and because she was so frail, and because she had no children of her own, and was not accustomed to the noise and bustle they make, the little people annoyed her, and she failed to win their hearts as the other Aunts had won them. She did not even rank with Cousins, far less with Grand-aunts, in their affections.

The Grown-ups loved her very truly and tenderly, and the Doctor and the Doctor's Wife spent days and nights beside her bedside trying to keep the white Presence from touching her. In the Village there were no paid nurses. Mothers and aunts and friends, and even neighbors, did the nursing; not, perhaps, with the skill of the deft, white-gowned graduates who have so much knowledge stored up under their coquettish caps, but certainly with more sympathy than money can ever command. It seemed a kindlier way.

Finally a night came when the Presence would no longer be denied. He whispered something into the dull ear, and he took the listless hand into his own, and straightway all the frailty and pain and loneliness fell away, and Bright Beings, whom the weeping watchers could not see, led the tired spirit up the shining pathway to the Better Country it had longed to see. If the watchers had but seen that which was before their very eyes, how quickly they would have left off weeping!

Early the next morning the news came to the Oak House — the news that Aunt Bess was gone. Dead, they said.

Now Death had been in the Village before, and Rachel knew well that when he came people who were quite ordinary, and had never been in the least interesting before, became all-important. The green shutters of the house he had entered were closed. Grape hung on the knob of the front door-bell. Ladies dressed in black silk gowns went around to the side door, carrying the prettiest flowers from their gardens. Little sheets of black-edged paper were carried about, inviting people to the funeral. Then coaches never seen at any other time appeared as if by magic, and stood in rows before the house, and there was one sad vehicle at which one feared to look, but which had precedence of all. Children stood in frightened, fascinated rows against the fences across the street, and dared not go to bed unshriven for nights and nights thereafter. Yes, it was a very important thing to have an affliction in the family.

Breakfast over, and Tutu's over-vigilant eyes by great good hap evaded, Rachel inserted herself into her blue gown with all haste. It was only her second-best dress, but her best hat could be none too good for such an occasion, and as there was no use asking Tutu's permission, she

took it out of its box, slipped the string under her chin, looking in the mirror to see the effect of the bows standing stiffly above her close-cropped head, and felt herself equal to anything. She listened with prudent ears until she heard Tutu's loud voice in the kitchen, then she slipped down the stairs, out of the front door, and into the street.

"Mother would like the Grand-uncles and Aunts to be told first," she decided, so to their houses she repaired, stopping to tell the news to the acquaintances whom she met on the way. Rachel's acquaintance was very wide, much wider than that of any member of the family, so it took her some time to make the round of the relatives whom she wished to shock and surprise. The sad tidings had, in each case, gone before her, and she was not as much noticed as she had hoped to be, except by one Great-aunt-by-marriage, who suggested with unnecessary emphasis that Rachal would do well to go home and stay there. This lady was not a favorite, any more than poor Aunt Bess had been. She had such an annoying way of taking opposite views.

It would not do to slight the Particular

Friends, and who so particular as Sophy Jane's mother? A difference of opinion on some matter of importance discussed with Sophy Jane led to an inevitable conflict, and the homeward journey was marked with a sniff of anguish very hard to be borne, Rachel thought, by a person already stricken by sorrow.

The early dinner was over. Mother had not come down from the Old House, and Tutu had gone thither to assist in the gloomy bustle attendant upon such an event. It was very lonely. Perhaps one might be allowed to hang on the front gate? There could be no harm in that that Mary Bailly could see; so Rachel hung on the gate.

People were passing,—many people; and many more seemed to be gathered down beyond the Court-house. Some one told her that a wonderful thing was about to happen,—a Rope Dancer was to perform on a cable stretched high in the air and quite across Main Street.

Rachel fired instantly. It might have been possible that she should deny herself the delight of being thrilled by so fearsome a sight; but there was little Daffy — Daffy who ought to be taught things Daffy had never even heard of a

Rope Dancer, and might never have an opportunity to see one again. Duty pointed plainly and sternly down the street. Daffy's education must not be neglected even if Aunt Bess *was* dead.

"You'd better not, Rachel," warned Dick. "Mother sent word that you were to behave, and I shouldn't call it behaving going about to see sights."

"You're going yourself," replied the astute Rachel.

"I'm a boy ; girls are different. They have to be prim like ladies. Boys can go anywheres. You'd better not."

So off went Dick. He had on his everyday jacket and a rumpled collar, yet nobody told him to stay in the yard. The world was very unjust. It was miserable to be a girl. The spirit of a later age stirred within her.

"Daffy," said Rachel, persuasively, "wouldn't you like to go and see a man walk across the street on a rope high up in the air?"

"He'd fall off," said Daffy.

"Oh, no, he won't. He sticks on just like a fly on the ceiling. It'd be a great thing for you to see."

"I don't want to see. He'll fall off."

"Fiddlesticks! He does it every day. Come, Daffy."

"I'm afraid."

"'Fraid cat! 'Fraid cat!" taunted Rachel. Her temper was rising. It was too stupid in Daffy, when she was willing to do so much for her.

"Oh, don't, Rachel! I'll go! I'll go!"

"That's a good little girl, and now I'll tell you what. Aunt Bess is dead, you know, and we must be as respectable as ever we can, because we shall be a great deal noticed. Mother'd want us to wear our best clothes—if we went—" she added a little dubiously. "Don't you want to have on your new red dress and your hat with the quinch blossoms on it, and your red shoes?"

Daffy loved pretty things.

"Yes," she said.

She cried a little when Rachel pulled her hair in her endeavor to curl the brown ringlets that Mother wound so easily about her finger; but she stopped when the pretty gown and shoes went on. Not all the buttons of either were buttoned, since time pressed, but enough to hold

the things together; and when the hat with the crimson flowers went on, the little sister was a lovely little study in color. Rachel's own toilet was the affair of a moment only. She did not care for new shoes; — those she had on were not so very dusty or old, — and she climbed into the fresh "brilliant" without much ceremony, managing to get three or four buttons into as many button-holes, haphazard, with scanty loss of time. The best hat went on as a matter of course. She liked best hats.

So forth they fared.

"We must walk slow, Daffy," said Rachel, impressively. "Families in affliction always walk slow. I've seen them at funerals. And you wait here," she added in after thought. "I've got to go back and get Mother's veil. Ladies always wear veils to funerals, and this is a kind of one. People might say things if I went to a rope dancing without a veil."

Obedient Daffy stood sucking her fat thumb until Rachel reappeared with the folds of handsome lace flapping about her thin, eager face; and then, hand in hand, and keeping step to some imaginary dirge, they walked slowly along the street.

"What's that?" asked Daffy, pointing to a dark spot against the eastern sky.

"That? oh, my goodness gracious! that's the Rope Dancer coming out to begin. If we don't hurry, we'll miss some. Run, Daffy, with all your might!"

"Wait till I pull up my stockings. You didn't put on my garters."

"Never mind your stockings, Silly! Do you want to miss the starting out? Run, I say!"

"Are those the Doctor's children tearing along like wild things?" asked the Minister's Wife, who was coming out of the Milliner's shop. "Do look, Miss Ould! Rachel has on her mother's Brussels lace veil. Her clothes are only half on, and — poor Daffy! Oh! the little thing has fallen down. Her stockings are all under her poor little feet. People who have no children cannot be too thankful," she added piously.

"People who might have had *that* kind, can't," acquiesced Miss Ould, tartly; "but very few are afflicted with a limb like that Rachel. She was here yesterday, begging for some scraps of crape. She said her doll would most likely have to go

into mourning shortly, and she wished to have her things ready. Did you ever see her doll? Not a whole inch to its body, or a rag of proper clothes to its name. She's an awful child."

"I'm sorry for her parents," said the Minister's Wife, stepping daintily away in the direction opposite to the crowd which was now augmented by the arrival of two dishevelled and gasping little figures. Daffy, indeed, announced her presence by loud wails in honor of a skinless knee; but Rachel, with her veil down, glowed scarlet in her efforts to quiet the little sister, to preserve the family dignity, and to watch the Dancer at the same time.

What a wonderful man he was, to be sure! What beautiful clothes he wore! What unheard-of pink stockings, and what a gayly plumed hat! How lightly he balanced his wand of gold, and with what confidence he stepped along that gossamer thread in mid-air! Ah! surely he was falling. Cold chills rushed deliciously down the spine as one saw him fall, recover himself, and whirl and wheel about the magic rope, the plumed cap and glittering wand flashing in the sunshine. What a king of men must he be, that beautiful brilliant creature, who could sail like a

bird through the summer skies! Why should a vision so delightful ever fade out into the common light of day? Why could not a moment of such ecstasy last forever?

“Rachel, come home this instant!”

The ecstatic moment was at an end already. Here was—not the Doctor, who had humor, or the Doctor’s Wife, who had tenderness—but Tutu, the stern avenger of all lapses from the strictest code of morals; Tutu, who, returning from the Old House, had missed the children and with a fatal instinct had followed to take her victims red-handed; Tutu, who carried the key to the closet in which familiar prison many a long hour was darkly passed; Tutu, who controlled, absolutely, the bread-and-jam market, and in whose hands was the hour when bed could be no longer avoided.

There was a consultation before the funeral.

“The child is so excitable,” said the Doctor’s Wife; “she has gotten herself into such a state about poor Bess, and the Rope Dancer, and the punishment Tutu gave her before I got home, that I really do not know what to do with her. Her father says emphatically that she is to be left at home. He hates scenes, and he says she

will be sure to make one if we bring her up here."

"Poor little dear," said the softest-hearted of the Aunties; "let her stay at home. I never believed in taking nervous children to sad places."

"She'll make trouble either way," observed the Bachelor Uncle, consolingly. "She has a genius for it."

"Let her stay and play in the garden until five o'clock," said the Other Aunt. "And then let her join us here. You know Mother wishes to observe the old custom they had at home in Virginia, and to have us all take our first meal together — afterward."

So Dick and Daffy were dressed betimes, and drove away in a coach. It was with a pang of envy that Rachel saw this mark of distinction bestowed upon them. She had screamed with terror at the idea of going with them; now she wept with misery because she had been left behind. The house had been locked, and she had been strictly bidden to stay in the garden or on the porch, where her favorite "Mr. Wind and Madam Rain" lay on the step. Her best hat hung on the door-knob, waiting

until the Town Clock should strike five, when she was to go to the Old House. It had been the best the Elders could do for her. Tutu was quite too much one of the family not to be allowed to share outwardly in its sorrow, and so was Mary Baily; so they also had entered a coach and been driven off to the house of mourning.

Rachel sat on the step and leaned her head on her hands. No one passed by to notice this interesting attitude, so she took up a position nearer the gate and began to sing. She loved to sing, and the neighborhood was well used to her shrill carollings. In her present condition she felt that something distinctively religious was demanded; so looking over her *répertoire* of sacred music, she selected the most doleful and began:—

“The day is past and gone,
The evening shades appear.
Oh, may we all remember well
The night of death draws near.”

Even this mournful wail brought no sympathetic friend into view. No one heard her but the robins in the ash tree, and the chipping sparrows in the arbor vitæ, and they were rejoicing in the

Lord with all their glad, grateful hearts, and not bothering in the least about the "night of death." They left all that to the Father of Life, and were not moved in the least by the dismal hymn.

It was very dull. Perhaps she might get ill and die there all alone. Perhaps robbers might come, or gypsies. It was certainly not safe. She went to the gate and balanced herself thereon, prone upon her stomach. Two little girls were within sight. She did not know the little girls, but she was not averse to extending her visiting list.

"Hey-oh!" she called.

"Hey-oh, yourself," the little girls responded.

"Come over."

"We can't. We're waiting for the Perkinses."

"Well, bring them along," she cried sociably. "We can play hide-and-seek in the garden. Wait till I go and get Jinny."

Jinny's parents had not been long in the Village, and knew but few people and but little of what was happening; so Jinny's mother saw no reason why her little girl should not accept the very politely expressed invitation of the Doctor's daughter, and she said, "Yes, Jinny might go and play."

As they hurried up the street, they saw three boys who were not in Dick's good graces, but whose names were not unknown to Rachel.

"Come up to my house," said that now emancipated lady. "We're going to play hide-and-seek in the garden. Oh, no! I'll tell you what we can do better'n that. We'll go to the Stonecutter's and sit on the gravestones and see my Aunt's funeral go by. It's going to be an awful big one. Masons, perhaps, and—and—Firemen, I shouldn't wonder, and I ought to see it, so's I can remember it as long as I live;—my own Aunt's funeral," she added impressively. "Mother gave me a little bag of lemon drops, and we'll suck them while we wait. There are the Perkinses and the others. Jinny, you call them to come, and motion to them to hurry. I choose that monument to sit on. It's the highest, and I ought to have it. Get off, Dan Davis, this minute! I should think you'd be ashamed to want to take it away from me. It's *my* Aunt that's getting buried, not *yours*."

Slowly through the blossomy Old Orchard and down the shady street came the sorrowful procession. The day was warm, as late May days sometimes are, and Village etiquette did not

demand any uncomfortable drawing of carriage curtains, even of those behind which the stricken old parents wept over the last parting with their youngest born. People, peeping from the windows, saw the brothers and sisters, and the long, long line of relatives and friends who were showing their respect in the kindly old-fashioned way of seeing the mortal bodies of those who had left them, laid in the safe keeping of the gentle earth; and although the Masons and Firemen of Rachel's imagination were not there, it was a long retinue that came into view. The horses walked at their slowest pace, and then there came a moment when all grief was lost in the fresh scandal Rachel was bringing on her name.

Smiling joyfully, waving her scrawny arms in recognition, she sat perched upon the highest tombstone surrounded by children whom no one knew, who smiled because Rachel smiled, and set up a shrill cheer as each coach passed by.

"My Grandparents are in that carriage," announced the excited Rachel, "and my two Aunts, I wish they'd look out. Oh, look! Here's Father and Mother, and Dick and Daffy. Dick sees me. Hey-oh, Dick! Hey-oh, Daffy! Mother! Now they're past, and those are my other Grand-

parents. I wonder what makes Grandma look so cross. Grandpa laughed, I saw him. All the rest are Uncles and Aunts and Cousins and Particular Friends. We have a large connection, and it's very gratifying to have so much sympathy at this time," she went on, quoting a remark she had overheard among the Grown-ups, as the last carriage passed, and she, shifting a lemon drop from one cheek to the other, prepared to descend from her perilous coign of vantage. "Now you can all go home. I must go and get my hat off the door-knob, and go up to the Old House. It isn't five o'clock exactly, but we're all to eat supper up there together. It's an old custom in Virginia, when a Family is in affliction."

CHAPTER VIII

Fetching the Spoons

NOBODY in the Village had ever heard of a five o'clock tea; nobody had ever given a *dîner à la Russe*. The young people, just budding into manhood and womanhood, had little dances now and then; but they had never heard of a *cotillon*, and the gowns worn at a modern small-and-early would have filled them with amazement. It is easy to see, therefore, how primitive the Village was. Yet there, as everywhere, Cupid was busy, and there was a great deal of very pleasant hospitality. People went out often to spend the day, and they constantly took tea with each other in a very sociable and informal way; while once or twice during the Winter the houses of persons of consequence were opened to as many friends as could be comfortably accommodated. These reunions were called parties. They began at eight o'clock, and before midnight the silver had all been washed

and put away, and the lights which had blazed a welcome far down the snowy streets were out for the night.

There was no caterer from whom a supper could be ordered. Everything was made in the home of the hostess, unless she had sisters. In that event, they made the lemon jelly and the cocoanut cakes. The whipped cream was always made by the giver of the feast herself, and no hand but hers was light enough to heap it into the tall sillabub glasses, or to drop in the conserved cherry that was its crowning grace. If anybody had red geraniums blossoming in her window, and she were invited to a party, she cut her treasures on the fête day and carried them to the party house, where they were placed in a vase on the piano. Otherwise there would have been no flowers. People borrowed or loaned cake stands and baskets, and teaspoons, and even plates, quite openly. It made a guest feel at home to see her own initials on the fork with which she ate her salad; and it was no derogation to the dignity of a hostess to hear the whispered comment: —

“How her Aunt Henrietta’s silver candlesticks do set off the table!”

The Doctor's Wife was going to give a party.

The Minister's Wife's mother had been paying her daughter a visit, and the party was to be given in her honor. The Minister's Wife had given two parties. To the first, all the congregation and all the friends outside the congregation whose names began with letters up to M were invited; to the second, the people whose names began with letters after M. Thus, even captious persons could not complain that they were asked to a "second-best" party. The parties were given on two succeeding nights, so that things left over from Tuesday's feast would still be fresh on Wednesday, and the borrowed things could stay on until all was over. It was very well planned.

The Doctor's house was larger than the Manse, and it would not be expected that he should invite all his fellow-churchgoers, or even all his patients, so there would be a party at Oak House on one night only.

The list was made out by streets. One of the Aunts said she would see to the invitations, so on the Saturday before the Wednesday of the party she sat by Jimmy in the Doctor's sleigh, with Paul and Dick crouched at her feet among

the buffalo robes and wolfskins, and they jingled about from house to house. The boys got out by turns and pulled at the door-bells. When the door was opened (as it nearly always was) by the lady of the house, they made very nice bows, and said, "Mother" (or "Aunt Kitty") "was going to have a party next Wednesday night, and she hoped Mr. and Mrs. Smith would come." Everybody knew the party would begin at eight o'clock, so there was no use of repeating that. Everybody knew Dick and Paul, so there was no necessity to say that the party would be at the Doctor's; and, besides, everybody had heard of it already, and was ready to accept the invitation promptly and with thanks. Then the boys jumped off the porch on the side where the snow was deepest and waded back to the sleigh. So in a little while all the people were invited.

On Sunday, in the Sunday-school, the children were very polite to Dick and Rachel. Often there was enough left from Grown-ups' parties to allow the children to have one the next day. Invitations were then issued in the morning before school took in, and in the afternoon the children came back to their studies with their best clothes on, all ready to repair to the house

of feasting directly school was over. To-day Lucy offered to let Rachel hold her muff, which was very civil in Lucy, because when she got it at Christmas, and walked out of Sunday-school the Sunday next after, carrying it with just pride, the muffless Rachel had called after her, spitefully, "Cat fur! cat fur!"

On Monday, not only Mary Baily and Tutu, but the Doctor's Wife also, retired to the kitchen. It was the old story of getting ready for the Congressman over again, only on a much larger scale. Hams were boiled, chickens were boiled, turkeys were roasted. The Aunts were to make the lemon jelly and the cocoanut cakes, but all the other cakes were to be made at home—five kinds.

When cake is made, a great deal of good-tasting stuff sticks to egg whips, and spoons, and to the sides of bowls, — sweet dough, custard, frosting, jelly, and chocolate. Remembering this, both Dick and Rachel offered to stay at home and help, but as they were not allowed, Daffy scraped all the good sticking stuff and arranged it along the edges of a plate. She hardly took a lick herself, but saved all the delicacies conscientiously until her elders could have a share.

Daffy was a good little girl. She loved sweet things; but she loved Rachel, and oh, with all her faithful little heart, she loved Dick.

Mary Baily was good too. She saved out enough batter to make four little saucer cakes. The children could divide them with their little cousins, and with Sophy Jane and Jimmy.

All the cakes were done by the time school was out. The Cousins came home with the children, so did Sophy Jane and Jim. They all walked up to the cold spare-room where the cakes were. An old table-cloth had been spread over the bureau, and the loaves stood there in a row. Tears almost came into Jimmy's eyes.

"I wish I could stay all night," he said, fervently.

"You'd have to sleep with Dick if you did," said Rachel, discouragingly. "Tutu locks this room up tight, — when there's cake."

Sophy Jane had a married sister.

"We didn't have as many as that for Sister's wedding," she said, impressed.

As they descended the stairway, Rachel explained that there were more at the Aunts', — Co-coanut. Sophy Jane thought it more than likely that enough would be left over to warrant a

children's party. However, she was safe, as both she and Jimmy as well as the Cousins were asked to come and help. Children always answered the party-bell, showed the ladies to the hostess' chamber, and the gentlemen to the spare-room upstairs.

On Wednesday there was no regular dinner, only a picked-up one. The Doctor went to see a sick man in the country, and would stop at Linwood for his dinner. Grandpa never went to evening parties; but Grandma was coming in to stay all night.

Rachel carried a note to school. It was pinned on with two pins, so she could not lose it. It was to the Lady Principal, to ask if the little girl might be allowed to stay at home that afternoon. The Lady Principal was asked to the party, and so were several of the Teachers. One of them had her head gracefully draped with a gray barège veil all day, so that she need not take her hair out of crimping pins before night. Permission was, therefore, a foregone conclusion.

Everybody had their "bite" in the kitchen. The dining room was to be used as an extra parlor. On a side table, however, plates and napkins were piled up, and trays of forks and

spoons. It takes a great many for more than ninety people to eat with. Supper was to be passed to people wherever they might chance to be when quarter-to-ten o'clock came. Plates and napkins first, and so on.

"Now, Rachel," said her mother, directly luncheon was over, "put on your wraps, and run up to the Old House, and ask Grandmother and the Aunts to send down as many spoons and forks as they can spare. Take this little satchel, and make haste, for I shall need you very much this afternoon."

Rachel wished to see her mother put the finishing touches to the parlor. It was a very pretty parlor indeed. A good many red geraniums had been sent in, and Aunt Henrietta's great silver candle branches fitted with wax candles stood on the piano. Tutu had fetched these in person. So the parlor looked very gay.

"Yes'm," said Rachel. She hated going, but she went.

On the way she met the Warrender girls. They had had measles, and although they were now well, they had not reëntered school. Time hung rather heavily on their hands, and they were very glad to accept Rachel's invitation to

go up to the Old House with her. They had been looking for a long gutter on which to skate, and had their skates hanging to their shoulders in case they found one. When they got to the Old House, they said they would not go in. There was a nice gutter there, not long enough for skating, but quite long enough for sliding, so they would slide and keep warm while Rachel went in.

The Aunties had all the spoons and forks tied up by half-dozens, and the half-dozens were rolled in tissue paper. They put them in the satchel and snapped the lock.

"Be careful, Rachel," warned the Eldest Aunt.

"Oh, poor little thing!" cried the Middle Aunt. "I should think she would be so tired of being told to be careful."

"She would not hear it so often if it were not necessary," said the other, darkly. "Rachel is very careless."

However, this time Rachel would remember to be careful.

She went out into the street. The Warrenders were at the gate. They had made a discovery.

There was a gentle slope behind the Old House; and while the hollow at its foot was not marshy

in Summer, it was partly filled by Fall rains and Winter snows, and formed a very respectable little pond. Now it was frozen over, and had been swept by the boys, marks of whose skates shone on the black ice. The Warrenders said the ice was splendid; wouldn't Rachel like to go down and look at it?

So they went down. The black, smooth ice was very tempting. The Warrenders sat down on the snow and buckled on their skates. Then they stood up, holding fast to Rachel's arm, and after balancing themselves, and squealing a little from fright, they slid off over the pond.

"Let me try," begged Rachel.

No; the Warrenders preferred to use their own skates. They had not been trained to think of others.

Rachel ached with cold; she ached with envy. The Warrenders slid about rapturously. They could not skate very well. It seemed unfair that those clumsy children, who at best could only make strokes enough to justify a slide, and who fell down so much, should have skates; while Rachel, who was like a gull for fleetness when the steels were strapped to her feet, should stand in the snow, shivering and miserable.

Suddenly she remembered that Paul kept his skates in the woodshed.

"Wait a minute," she called to the Warren-
ders, and off she ran.

Yes; the skates were there, and by great good fortune she had on, under her little arctic over-shoes, her boots that had bored heels. She hung the satchel with the spoons in it on the nail where the skates had dangled, and she forged forth clumsily over the snow. It is hard to walk with skates on.

Once on the ice, Rachel was a new creature. She darted, she whirled, she balanced, she flew. Her cheeks glowed, her little body swayed, her arms waved. The Warrenders fell down several times in trying to keep her plaid skirt in view. Rachel never fell.

It had been two o'clock when she left home; now it was nearly four, and nights close in early in the North. It was not a sunny day at best.

At one side of the hollow, blackberry bushes grew. They belonged on Grandfather's lower lot, and bore a fine crop of berries in Summer-time. Everybody said it was because the water stood about the brambles in Winter. Perhaps the strong canes carried some latent heat

within their purple bark ; as, for some reason, the ice about them was very thin. Rachel did not know this ; but it somehow happened that it was nearly four o'clock before she thought of exploring that part of the hollow where a light snow lay and where the blackberries grew.

The ice cracked. It did not creak first as good ice would have done ; it simply broke into a hole, and let Rachel down into the water.

The pond was very shallow, and as she caught at a berry cane in falling, she did not fall in far. Only up to her waist. The Warrenders began to cry. They pulled off their skates and ran home.

Rachel had no idea of crying. She broke her way to a thicker ice layer ; then she lunged forward on her stomach and quickly crawled to a place of safety, and started across the lower lot toward the Old House. She was very cold and a good deal frightened now all danger was over.

She opened the kitchen door and clumped across to the stove ; no one was in the kitchen, but in the living-room the ladies heard a peculiar noise, and came out to see what it meant.

Rachel now began to cry, and the Aunties,

with all haste, pulled off her wet clothing, unbuckled the skates, and carried her wrapped in warm shawls to the living-room fire. Her flesh was almost black it was so red, and she wailed miserably, with her face against Grandmother's shoulder.

"There, there!" soothed Grandmother.

Clothes of Molly's were soon produced, thick stockings and petticoats and things, and shoes out of Paul's closet. The clothes were a little small, and the shoes were over-large, but they were dry. One of the Aunties gave her a dose out of a teaspoon, and a mug of hot milk. Rachel then felt herself ready to face the world again.

"I must go now," she said. "Thank you very much, indeed. I'll bring Molly's things back to-morrow and get mine. They'll be dry by then. Now I must go home with the spoons."

"The *spoons*!" the Aunties lifted their hands in horror. "Didn't you take them down long hours ago?"

"N—n—no'm. I was skating on the pond. They're all right. I left them hanging on a nail in the woodshed."

Yes; the spoons were safe. Rachel showed

the satchel to the ladies before she started. It was getting dark. The Old Orchard lay before her, a gloomy waste. Who could tell what sort of 'Fraid Things might lurk behind the trees? A wind had come up, and the boughs creaked ominously. It was time for earnest prayer and for swift running.

Rachel both prayed and ran, and nothing happened. Something did happen, however, when she opened the front door at home, and, arrayed in clothes not her own and a year too small, she offered the satchel to Tutu.

"Would you object to telling where you've been since two o'clock?" asked Tutu, with icy politeness; "or to say how your clothes came to shrink up above your knees? Perhaps that is a new party dress."

"I do not think she will need a party dress to-night," said her mother, sadly. "Little girls who run away cannot expect to enjoy parties. I think, my dear, I can read the story of this afternoon in your face. You have been skating somewhere, and you fell in, and had to go to the Aunties to be dried and warmed. I am glad, indeed, that nothing worse happened to you; and I am glad Grandmother's silver is safe. Does

my little girl like to think of what might have happened to the things trusted to her? No, Rachel, there is no help for it. You must go to bed."

At quarter to eight Rachel could hear Sophy Jane and Jimmy and Paul and Molly talking to Dick downstairs. At eight o'clock the first ringing of the bell occurred, and then it rang in quick succession until almost all of the ninety people bidden to the party had arrived. How pleasant it must be downstairs, where all the talking and laughing was going on! Rachel could imagine the lights in the lamps, in the candlesticks, and in the great silver candelabra. She could picture to herself the pretty dresses of the ladies. The men, she knew, had on the coats they wore to Church on Sunday, so there was no need to waste time thinking about them; but had Miss Emily worn her pink silk gown, and had Cousin Josephine her pearl earrings on? Oh, how she wanted to know! Cousin Josephine was a bride; what if she *should* have worn her wedding dress!

Somebody played on the piano, "Listen to the Mocking-bird," and a long piece with a great many trills and runs. Then Miss Emily sang. People who had heard Jenny Lind sing, said

that her voice was no more beautiful than Miss Emily's. It was, indeed, hardly possible for a voice to be more pure and sweet, or to carry more of that nameless something for which we have no better word than charm. Then a young man with a bass voice sang. It almost made one's flesh creep to hear how very deep his tones could go. Then the Minister's Wife sang a very pretty song, and then everybody sang together three or four songs, — "Annie Laurie," "Bonny Doon," and so on, while she played the accompaniments. It was a very agreeable party.

Rachel began to smell coffee. Tutu never made the coffee until the minute it was needed. Yes, the music had stopped, and no doubt supper was beginning.

Rachel buried her face in the pillow. If only God would make her be a better girl, and not let Satan tempt her to neglect her duty again! Satan was so big and strong, and she was only a little girl, and it was mean of him to make her lose the party. It was mean in herself, she owned, honestly. Nobody made her go to skate. It had been her own idea; still, it was very hard, and she was very miserable.

Merry voices floated up from below, and

sounds of spoons and cups and glasses. Rachel fancied that she could smell things — even cocoanut cake. It seemed as if a year had passed since she was banished to the chilly upper room. Then she heard Dick whisper:—

“Tutu said you couldn’t have any supper; but here’s a plate with half of mine on it. I divided even. There’s going to be lots left over.”

Rachel sat up and dried her now radiant eyes.

“You’re the very best boy in all the world,” she said.

CHAPTER IX

A Chapter of Calamities

ONE of the many pleasant things about the Village was the freedom with which people followed their fancies. Mrs. Grundy, it is true, had her part to play in the regulation of the general tone of Society, and a few persons who acted as private detectives kept watch and ward over the general welfare of the community; but a very wide latitude was permitted in the following of individual tastes. If it were either convenient or necessary that a family drive about in a chariot so old that long before the horse drawing it came into view the rattling of the bones of the ancient vehicle announced its coming; or if it were thought best to postpone the painting of the family residence until it had weathered to a silvery gray, nobody commented or criticised. So, too, people kept cows or dogs, or hens, or geese or ducks, as pleased them or not, and as everybody's garden was guarded by a good fence,

nobody disapproved of the live stock. Pigs were distinctly frowned upon ; but no veracious chronicler would venture to state that so far as the Village was concerned, pigs were extinct animals. They did their grunting behind bars, if they did it at all, and there was supposed to be a Constable (whom nobody ever saw), who would drive an errant pig to a Pound (which nobody ever saw, either) if he found one straying about. With geese and ducks it was different, for what with either the Camp-pond, or the Gypsy-pond, or the Muckshaw, or Clear Lake, within easy distance of half of the Village houses, it would have been a waste of privilege not to own a flock of the fowls so beautiful afloat, so ridiculous ashore.

After much consideration at Oak House it was decided to have ducks. They could be kept in the hen yard when they came home at night, and would add a pleasing variety to that part of the premises. At first the Doctor objected, even going so far as to make a pun about not liking to hear himself called a quack every time he walked in the garden ; but as Tutu and the children had set their hearts in that direction, he wisely gave in. To two trustworthy hens there were

intrusted, therefore, two large "sittings" of greenish, oily-looking eggs, and the waiting period began.

It took a long time for the eggs to hatch out, — ages. The boys, at the risk of their lives, ousted the clamorous hens many times each day to look at the eggs, which looked always just the same, although days and even weeks lagged by. Tutu, you may be sure, did not know of this. It would have made her very angry to know that her hens were being disturbed. The ducks were to be hers. Part of the forthcoming broods she intended to serve on the family table, but the greater number of the fowls were to be sold for the benefit of Foreign Missions. She loved Foreign Missions, and she would gladly take any pains to further their interests.

The children were not especially excited on the subject of Foreign Missions, but they were wild for the eggs to be hatched; and when Tutu was forced to go back to Canada to see her sister who was ill, they were greatly distressed lest the hens put off hatching out until her return.

Rachel hurt her foot. It was not a dangerous hurt, but the Doctor said that she must stay in bed. She would be safe there, and she would be sure not to be safe elsewhere. So he bade

her content herself with bed until he gave her permission to get up. Take it all in all, she had a very pleasant time. Sophy Jane and Molly came to see her every day, and both of the Grandmothers, and almost all the Aunts, — plain Aunts and Grand-aunts, — sent all sorts of good things to eat, so that she was able to entertain her visitors in fine style. All of her favorite books were arranged on a table beside the little cot which had been placed for her in her mother's chamber; and when different ladies sent her crocuses or daffodils and other Spring flowers, these were put beside the books. Dick read aloud to her in *Captain Bonneville's Adventures*; and although she felt herself too old for dolls, she spent a great many agreeable hours with Daffy's paper children. If one must have dolls, paper ones are best — the kind made out of writing paper, painted with water colors, and cut out with scissors. If one gets torn, a dozen can easily be made to take its place. The dolls were called Grices, after a family of real children who came to Sunday-school. There were, however, many more paper Grices than real ones. It seemed as if Daffy could never have enough Grices.

150 THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY

Dick came in, jubilant. The duck eggs were hatched. Oh, my ! but they were funny-looking. Rachel would die of laughing if she could see their solemn-looking little faces and their funny bills. As for their feet, they were the most wonderful feet any one could imagine. Exactly like a real duck's foot.

Rachel began to cry. She begged to be allowed to hop out on one foot to the barn, just long enough to see the ducks ; but, no ; the Doctor was firm in his opposition to any hopping whatever, and poor Rachel was forced to content herself with the recitals of others concerning the perfections of the ducks. It was very hard.

The next day was Mary Baily's afternoon out, and the Doctor's Wife was reading aloud out of one of the little volumes of Hans Andersen's stories. She had to be very careful not to do any skipping. The little girls knew exactly what came next to everything, and so the story could not be shortened. It would have been a pity to shorten it, since every word written by the dear old Dane was filled with the highest truth, and the gentle spirit that wove the delicate fancies was that of one whose angel did always behold the face of the Father. The Doc-

tor's Wife loved him almost as much as the children did ; but sometimes she felt that it would be agreeable to do a little skipping. She had finished the history of *The Ugly Duckling* — chosen in honor of the new arrivals — and had begun to read about *The Twelve Wild Swans* ; but the story was doomed to be left unfinished that day, for Paul came down from the Old House, to say that Grandmother felt very unwell, and would the Doctor and Aunt Kitty please go up at once.

The Doctor was out on his rounds, and would not be back before five o'clock. Mrs. Doctor felt that she could not wait so long before knowing what ailed Grandmother ; and as there was nothing in Rachel's condition in the least degree alarming, she decided to go up to the Old House at once, leaving word for the Doctor to follow her directly he returned, when she would drive down with him. She put the house in Dick's hands, and gave him strict charges to keep Rachel from exerting herself. Rachel also promised to be good and quiet, and, with her paint box, her scissors, and plenty of paper, there was no reason why she should not spend the afternoon very contentedly making Grices.

Dick and Paul repaired at once to the stable,

where the nests were placed, and where the hens were clucking anxiously at their strange fledglings. The two old creatures seemed to be consulting together, as human mothers might do, over some juvenile maladies which were beyond their ken. On previous Summers both had reared broods of the dearest, downiest little yellow chicks, which had proved a credit to their up-bringing; and although hens may not have the longest memories in the world, they knew well enough that those darlings had neither the feet nor the bills of these little troublesome fowls, nor had their speech such a peculiar accent.

The hens were resolved to do their duty, however, and resented the frequent appearance of the excited children, who demoralized the ducklings sadly by their proffers of affection. They now set up a great to-do, and spread their wings in a threatening manner.

The boys stood with their hands in their trousers pockets and discussed the ducks. By reason of living near a pond much frequented by their kindred, Paul felt that his opinions were of value.

“Have they been in swimming yet?” he asked.

"No; I should say not. They're too little."

"Indeed they are not, then. Ducks can swim as soon as they are born. They look awful funny paddling about."

Yes; it must be funny, and Dick would like to see them swim; but he did not think his mother would like him to carry the ducks as far as the Muckshaw, and besides he could not leave Rachel.

"Hasn't Rachel seen them yet?"

No; but she was crazy to do so.

"Ducks can't learn to swim, if they are not taken to water," observed Paul. "And who would have old land ducks? Might as well have chickens to begin with, if they've got to peck and cluck about a barn floor all their lives. They've got to begin early, or maybe the hens'll teach them hen ways, and then they'll be no good at all. I say, let's take them into Rachel's room and teach them to swim this afternoon."

"How?" asked Dick, slowly.

"How! In a tub, boy. We can carry in a tub and fill it with water afterward, and then we'll take the little ducks and plump them in. It will be great fun, and it will be grand for Rachel."

Rachel put the Grices by directly the new sport was proposed. She could hardly wait until the boys brought in the tub, and it seemed as if they simply never would get it full of water. It was put close beside the cot on which Rachel was propped up with pillows, so that she could have the best possible view. The carpet was quite wet before the tub was full enough. Daffy took the towels from the rack and tried to sop up the spilled water. She only got herself wet, and spoiled the towels — Daffy was too little to sop.

Then the boys went to the stable again. They were gone a long time. One boy kept the hens at bay, while the other darted about after the ducklings. The little things were very nimble, and it seemed as if they would never all be caught. At last all were in the basket. The hens were extremely displeased, and expressed themselves with vigor. If they had been real mothers instead of step-mothers, they could not have taken the conduct of the boys more to heart.

“Oh, do let me have the basket!” screamed Rachel, as the boys came into her room. “Oh, the lovely things! Oh, boys, did you ever see

such beauties? Oh, Daffy, you never let on how perfect they were!"

"The all-yellow one is mine," said Daffy; "the one with the little black parting to its hair. Tutu said we could each have one for our own. Mine is named Henrietta."

"Oh, did she truly? Then I'm going to have this one with a black head. Oh, you dear love! You're going to be the sweetest duck ever seen, with a curly tail, and green on your wings and your head. Perhaps you'll turn into a swan. I should not be in the least surprised if you do. Your name is Prince Charming, beauty, and nobody is ever going to eat you as long as you live."

Prince Charming seemed glad to hear that, and cuddled down by Rachel's chin in a very contented way. The whole cot was overrun with little ducks, squeaking and quacking.

The boys were eager to have the swimming begin, and there was now more darting and clutching on their part. It was a wonder the birds did not die of the suffocation or the bruises they were obliged to endure before they were dropped, one by one, into the tub of pure water, fresh from the northwest corner of the coldest well in town.

It was a far greater wonder to see them swim. Directly they touched the water, the little paddles began working, and the little bodies floated about like steam-tugs in a harbor, busily and ceaselessly. The children hung over the tub in an agony of delight. It was a joy that could not be sated, and nothing could exceed the agility of the performing ducks.

"Henrietta's got to come out," said Daffy. "I want to hold her; and besides, I know she's tired."

"Tired!" the boys jeered; "they like it the best kind, all of them. Ducks stay in for hours and hours, and dive about like anything."

"These fellows haven't dived a time," said Paul. "I told you those old hens were no good. What do they know? It's lucky for the ducks that I came down to-day."

"I should think they ought to be able to dive," Dick meditated. "If you hold one under water for a minute, he'll find how nice it is, and then they'll all want to dive. Perhaps the reason they haven't tried is because they have nothing to dive for."

One was held under, and then another; but there seemed to be no incentive to further

divings, either on their part or that of their mates.

"I tell you they have nothing to dive for," insisted Dick. "Real ducks are always after something to eat, down in the bottom of the pond, — Polliwogs and things, — and they're lucky if a snapping-turtle does not get them when they do it. You go out and get some corn."

The corn was procured, and shone, yellow and bright, in the little shifting spaces between the swiftly paddling ducks, who took no notice of it. It might as well have been a handful of pebbles for all they cared.

"Hold another under, Paul."

"Not Prince Charming," shrieked Rachel. "I do not wish him to be a diving duck, and he shall not be taught. A snapping-turtle might get him. He shall not be taught."

"Give me my Henrietta," demanded Daffy. "She is too little to eat corn, and she wants this lump of sugar. Come, Henrietta!"

Henrietta was at the farther side of the tub, and, besides being too little to eat corn, had not yet learned to understand English. It would have been too much to expect of a duck not two days old that it understand English as well as

the duck-and-hen languages. So she did not come.

Daffy leaned a little too far, and into the water she fell, heels over head.

Rachel shrieked again ; but before Daffy knew she was in, she was out again, wet and frightened. Then she began to howl.

“Oh, hush, for mercy’s sake, Daffy!” said Dick, who began to look forward instead of backward. “Hush, Daffy! Rachel, can’t you crawl out far enough to unbutton her back? Let her put on her nightgown and get into bed with you till somebody comes to dress her. I can’t. What do boys know about a girl’s nonsensical buttons and strings? Get into bed, Daffy, like a good little girl, and I’ll catch Henrietta, and you can play with her up there. Four o’clock! Paul, maybe the ducks have had paddling enough.”

The hens expressed themselves loudly and in great displeasure when their charges were returned to them. They were so busy trying to hover the poor little things that they did not peck at the boys, as they had done earlier in the day ; although if the truth be told, they were now much more peckworthy, and the long

patience and many cares of the good old hens were quite wasted because of their folly.

Paul came down the next day to see the ducks paddle again, but there was no paddling, and for the ducks there had been no next day. In spite of all that the Doctor and his Wife and Mary Baily and the hens could do, not one of the little creatures survived the cold water and the exercise prescribed by their friends. Twenty-one little brown and yellow corpses lay on the stable floor, and all — except Henrietta, whose body had been rescued by the weeping Daffy — found a common grave under the currant bushes.

The Doctor had his own way of teaching honor. He watched the boys levelling down the soil after their sad task was ended.

“They were not your ducks, you know,” he said. “Tutu had bought the eggs, and you know what she had planned to do with the duck money.”

Then he went on into his office.

Dick thought for a moment.

“There’s only one thing to do,” he said. “If those old hens will sit again, we’ve got to give them some more ducks’ eggs, and let them hatch out two more broods. They only had the ducks

two days, so maybe they'll forget that they had them at all, and will be willing to sit again. I'm going out to the Addition now to see if I can buy more eggs."

"I shall pay for half," said Paul; "I was the one that proposed the game. I have ten cents in my pocket this minute. Yesterday was Pay-day."

That cheered Dick not a little. He also had ten cents left over from Pay-day; and as Rachel had had several presents of pennies since her accident, and was wild to possess another Prince Charming, she added five cents to the store. Ducks' eggs were a penny apiece, and Rachel thought there would be four cents left over after twenty-one ducks' eggs were purchased in hope of replacing the twenty-one martyrs, and proposed that the boys spend this sum for mint-sticks. Dick said no; twenty-five eggs should be bought, as some might not hatch out into ducks, and they owed Tutu twenty-one ducks.

Daffy held her duckling to her breast. She was sure it would have grown to be a handsome duck. Its black hair-parting would have given it a most distinguished appearance. She could not be consoled.

Molly and Betty now came down, bringing Rachel some marmalade — enough marmalade, indeed, to spread on six slices of buttered bread. Mary Baily soon prepared the bread, and the thick marmalade was plastered on by Molly herself. The boys started off happily, carrying an empty basket between them, and munching the treat as they walked along.

Daffy and Betty went out into the garden. They did not feel much like playing, with the dead duckling pressed, limp and cold, to Daffy's sad little heart. They walked about and looked at the Spring flowers in the borders, — hyacinths and jonquils, dwarf iris and crimson-spotted cowslips. Each child had its own flower-bed. In Dick's stood the monument of a rabbit he had loved and lost long since. A Stonecutter, with whom he was on good terms, had made the nice little tombstone. He had cut "Our Rabbit" on it in large letters. The rabbit had really been Dick's private property, and he could have had the Stonecutter put on "My" with perfect propriety; but this would have excluded the little sisters, who had loved the rabbit tenderly, and mourned for him sincerely, from a seeming share in the

monument, and this Dick did not wish to do. When Betty saw the tombstone, she had an idea.

"Let's have a funeral for Henrietta."

"Rachel's sick," objected Daffy, who could imagine no pleasure without her sister's presence.

"Well, what of it? We needn't have a big funeral. It's only for a small duck, and you and I will do very well by ourselves. I'm tired of being ordered about by those big girls."

Betty spied a trowel and fell to digging.

Daffy became interested.

"Mother said we might pick one of every kind of flower," she said. "We can make Henrietta a nice little bed of hyacinths, and cover her up with cowslips."

So they might.

"We've got to sing and pray," said Betty. "I would not feel as if we'd done the right thing by Henrietta if we didn't."

Yes; they must sing and pray, and say a Verse. They began to think of the hymns they knew, and as she thought, Daffy's hand went into her apron pocket. It was nearly filled with Grices. She stood them up in a row against a brick near the grave. It seemed

to make Henrietta's funeral more important, having so many spectators. The Grices did not seem at all sorry, but that was because Rachel had painted all their mouths in the shape of a smile. It was not the fault of the Grices that they looked so cheerful.

"Do you know the song about the mountain, Betty? Rachel likes that one best of all our songs."

Yes; Betty knew it, so they sang:—

"Like the mist on the mountain,
Like the foam on the sea,
So short shall the days of our pilgrimage be."

Then Daffy said her Verse. Perhaps she did not quote her Author quite correctly, but she left out none of His spirit when she said:—

"Suffer little birdies to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for there is room for them in the Kingdom of Heaven."

The little maids knelt down and said, "Now I lay me," and then the little duckling was left to the wonderful and beautiful processes, by which, having had its little day, it passed to new uses.

Daffy's was a faithful little heart. The fresh sittings of eggs were duly hatched out by the

forgiving hens, and grew into handsome maturity before frost came; but none took the place of the departed Henrietta.

"No," said Daffy, in answer to Tutu's proffered gift. "I am not going to love any more ducks."

She had on that account all the more affection to bestow upon the puppy, which was presented by the little girls at the Last Farm, and it was on account of this pet, that the Doctor's Wife said she all but lost her religion. No one can think her blameworthy after he hears what happened.

The puppy was named Harry, and before Winter had grown to be a fine large dog. He had no beauty except a pair of great loving eyes, but he was as honest as it is possible for a dog to be, and he would not let a cow come anywhere near his charges. The little girls were not afraid to go anywhere with Harry along to protect them, and as he was always more than ready to accompany them, they went to many places they had hitherto thought unsafe. It was very good of Harry to give up his own plans to suit those of the children, for he was a very busy dog. Besides

harrying all the cows who wished to do a little foraging in his end of the Village, and chasing all the ducks except Tutu's ducks, he policed the street in front of Oak House so that no other dogs ventured to loiter about there. In a very short while no dogs even passed that way, Harry was so uncivil to them. If they had any errands down town, they went by a back street.

As for the country dogs, they almost gave up coming to town at all. They had been in the habit of trotting in under their masters' wagons, now and then, and seeing a little life in that way. It was a diversion from the monotony of farm life. After they became acquainted with Harry, they decided that they did not care to see life, if the price to be paid was a fight with Harry, in which they were sure to be worsted; and so, when the wagons loaded with wheat or corn or hay turned toward the Village, the farm dogs had pressing business elsewhere, and the horses went on alone.

The boys admired Harry immensely. They would have given anything if he had been their dog, and they offered Daffy everything they could think of if she would give him up. She was firm in her refusals; and so, although the boys

had him about with them whenever they liked, the real ownership was vested in Daffy.

A very ugly brindled dog came to town one day, a bull-dog. Harry rushed out to attack him, with all the courage in the world, but for once he had mistaken his foe. The fight was in front of the Blacksmith's shop, and was so exciting that all the workmen came out to look at it. The Farmer who owned the bull-dog stopped his horses, and sat in the wagon enjoying the sport. In spite of the encouragement of Harry's friends, the Blacksmiths, the bull-dog won the fight, and poor Harry went home with a badly damaged ear.

The ear healed, but it was constantly being hurt again. Harry had continual hallucinations on the subject of fleas, and every time he scratched his ear, he fairly howled with the pain of the freshly wounded flesh.

It was Sacrament Sunday, and it was very cold. Deep snow lay everywhere. Mary Baily usually went to Early Mass on such occasions; but on this day the drifts prevented, and she waited until later, when paths should have been cut. There would be a late dinner, for Tutu could not miss going to Church any more than

could the Doctor or his wife. It was decided that Dick and Rachel were quite old enough to be left in charge of the house. Some one always had to stay to answer the bell, and to tell patients when the Doctor would be back, or where he might then be found if it were an emergency case. Daffy was to go to Church. It was felt that she would be safer there.

The older children were much disappointed because they could not go. The Holy Supper was administered only three or four times a year, and they liked exceedingly to sit in one of the side pews and observe the rite. It was very solemn. The Minister prayed with more than usual fervor; the hymns were more than usually grave. There were few outward aids to faith in the plain House of God, and perhaps this made it all the more possible that one could almost see the bare, upper room in Jerusalem, and the little group of poor workingmen sitting at their simple evening meal, their faces lighted by the flare of a few oil lamps, and earnest and bewildered by the strange things one of their number was saying. He was a Carpenter, and they were nearly all of them Fishermen. One could almost hear the beautiful, tender Voice

blessing that first loaf of consecrated Bread, and filling with Wine that first Cup of Remembrance; and one longed to be found worthy at the last to sit down at the Marriage-feast of the Lamb.

The men sat, with gravely bowed heads. The women dropped their veils, and many of them wept softly thinking of loved ones who had "gone away." The Elder of the Church walked slowly and reverently up and down the aisles, passing the Elements. Each head was bent, as the mystical symbols were received. It was a pure and true worship, and was, without doubt, accepted by the Searcher of Hearts.

The family had not been long gone. The bells had just ceased tolling. The children were looking out of the windows, choosing horses, as the country people drove by. The game was to cry out "I choose!" when a horse was heard coming. The one who cried out first made believe to own the horse. If it turned out to be a fine, high-spirited animal, one was in luck; but if it were a clumsy work-horse, with a thick winter coat of ungroomed hair, one was jeered at and ashamed. It was a very good game, but it was not exactly a Sunday game. Perhaps it was not

really wicked, since all the horses were on their way to Church.

Harry was asleep by the kitchen fire. He had a bad dream about fleas, and immediately began to scratch his head. Then he gave a loud howl. The ragged scrap of flesh hung almost free from his ear.

Dick and Rachel ran to comfort him, but still Harry howled.

After an examination of the injury, Dick spoke firmly:—

“There is only one thing to do, and that is cut off the bad part, and there will never be a better time than this to do it.”

“Daffy won’t let us.”

“That’s just it. Every time Harry hurts himself, Daffy cries; and now we’ll just do it, and everything’ll be all right when she gets home.”

“It’s Sunday,” objected Rachel.

“Don’t Father do things for people on Sunday, I’d like to know?”

“You’re not Father.”

Dick helped himself to the scissors in Tutu’s basket.

“Never mind. All you have to do is to leave the kitchen.”

This Rachel willingly did. She was a great coward, and she hated pain.

"Don't hurt him," she called over her shoulder. Then she put a finger into each ear, and looked at the clock.

"He can't howl for more than five minutes," she reasoned; "I wouldn't myself, for such a little piece of skin. I'll keep corked up until five minutes are over."

When she took her fingers down, she heard Dick calling:—

"Why don't you come? I'm tired of screaming."

"I didn't hear you. I was all corked up."

"Well, come now."

Dick was pale enough to scare anybody.

"It hardly hurt him a bit," he explained; "but I never saw so much blood. We've got to stop it. Do you know how?"

Rachel considered.

"When I had toothache, Tutu tied on a piece of fat bacon," she said. "Teeth and ears are both part of your head, so I suppose that would be the best thing."

There was plenty of bacon in the pantry; string also. Rachel returned with both. Harry

did not seem to mind it at all. He was accustomed to the sight of gore, but it was usually the gore of others. He seemed to think there had been a fight; and as there was no other dog about, it was probably demolished. He was in a very pleasant frame of mind.

"Tie on the bacon, Rachel, while I hold his head."

If one has never tried to perform such a task, one has no ideas of its difficulty. Harry was patience itself. He allowed Rachel to try at least twenty different ways, but none of them succeeded.

Rachel then held Harry by the collar, and Dick tried another twenty ways, with no other result than the ruin of his Sunday linen.

Rachel was a sight; so were the white parts of Harry's coat; so were the towels; so was the floor. Dick was in terror.

"Let the dog go," he commanded. "I'm going to take him outside and hold snow to his ear. You'd better clean up. There won't be much left of us, if Tutu sees all this mess. Do make haste."

Rachel made haste. She spilled water over everything, and dragged the mop and broom

about with vigor. She worked very hard, but the harder she worked the worse things grew.

Dick came in ; the snow, or the cold, or what not, had stanchd the flow, and Harry was himself again.

“Do you call that cleaning?” he demanded. “It’s worse by far than it was before. You’d better —”

The Doctor’s key was in the door. Harry bounded forward. Daffy gave a loud wail of anguish. The family hastened through the doors that had been left open.

“I leave you to imagine my feelings,” said the Doctor’s Wife to Sophy Jane’s mother. “I had been so lifted up by the worship, and had come away so comforted, so happy, so grateful, so full of love for everybody, and so resolved to carry my new heart into my old life, and that was what I found waiting for me. I nearly lost all the religion I ever had, I was so provoked, and yet I could not keep from laughter when that poor, dear Dick began to explain. ‘We wanted to cure Daffy’s dog,’ he said. ‘We thought it would be such a pleasant surprise.’”

CHAPTER X

“Joys that we’ve Tasted”

THERE was, perhaps, never in the world a better place to be born in than was the Village. No sane child could have formed a wish the fulfilment of which was not ready to his hand. The cheerful and the changeful pages of the Seasons were here turned with a confidence born of knowledge that if one good went, another came; if the joys of Winter were past, those of Spring were just as sweet. School, of course, was an ever present evil, and had to be endured for a certain period of each day; but it was reduced to its minimum capacity for inflicting injury by the many and great blessings of the hours of freedom, when the boys and girls turned to beautiful, bountiful old Mother Nature, and were comforted.

About the Village there were woods and fields and marshes, there were ponds, crystal-clear, with islands lying on their fair bosoms, with sandy

cliffs where kingfishers and sand-swallows bored their nests, and with fish ready for every hook. Apparently, on purpose to suit the boys, bridges were built over the most convenient fishing places, and along the shady banks there were occasional fallen trees which made even better perches for a boy and a rod. Worms of most acceptable fatness for bait could be dug in almost everybody's yard; and from the time the first polliwog began to wiggle in the marshes, until the last muskrat retired to his domed house for the Winter, there was a constantly varying field of activity for the energy of the boys.

At the foot of the street on which the Doctor's alley opened, there was a pond to which Dick rode old Charley for water. This duty he not infrequently turned to profit by trading off so many rides on behind for things which other boys had to swap. They always said "swap"; so even although it is not so elegant a word as barter, it would hardly be fair to the boys to leave it out, when speaking of their transactions. It took Dick four weeks' worth of rides to pay the boy on the next corner for a pair of stilts, and long before the time was over, he had left off caring for stilts, so it seemed a little hard

to be still compelled to pay for them in rides. He was an honest boy, however, and he paid every ride, and even gave the boy a nest of little red paper pill-boxes out of the Doctor’s drawer to boot. These pill-boxes were very desirable possessions, and the command of a limited number of them gave Dick a valued prestige among his fellows. The children were not so fond of them when their mothers had sent for the Doctor professionally, and he had presented one filled with nasty-tasting little pellets, and had written on top: “For Jack. One after each meal.”

At the side of the watering place between that and the strip of shore which was the boys’ swimming place, there was a great plantation of yellow dock. Aristocratic water lilies floated, white and pure, in clearer, farther waters, things of beauty and of mystery, and types of much that the children would come to know later; while the docks were frankly vulgar plants, and loved the thick, rich mud and rank odors near shore. Nobody ever desired a bouquet of their hard, yellow, knobby flowers, but — it was dreadful, but it was true — almost all the boys liked the spatter-docks of the Muckshaw better than they did

the lilies, and this for a reason which was dreadful also — their stems were better to smoke.

Even Tutu seemed not to suspect why the boys had often such messy spots on their jacket linings, or their cotton waists; but it was really because they stuffed their blouses with the oozy dock stems, which were, directly opportunity offered, spread on the veranda roof to dry. They had plans of what to say in case Tutu found them there; but somehow she never did.

Sophy Jane knew of the stems, and she held her knowledge as a whip over the boys.

“If you don’t give us as many as we want, and let us smoke too, I shall tell, and then you’ll see,” she threatened. “It’s no worse for us to smoke than it is for you. The Minister smokes. Rachel and I are as big as you are, and our stomachs are as strong as horses, so you needn’t keep saying it will make us sick. It did make Paul sick? Well, it won’t make us.”

So it was arranged that Sophy Jane and Rachel should attend the Smoker.

Not every day, even after the lily stems had dried to a proper dryness, was there a chance to smoke. Somebody was always sure to be about. It was certainly strange what a faculty for being

about the Elders had, especially Tutu. At last a very good day came. It was Saturday. The Doctor was obliged to take a long drive to minister to an ill person, and as the day was fine he invited Mrs. Doctor to drive with him. Mrs. Doctor, in turn, invited Daffy to be of the party, so they set off early in the afternoon. The children were told, as usual, to be good. Usually they were also told not to play with matches; but on this day, by some happy chance, the matches were omitted from the final injunctions. It seemed an especial Providence.

Sophy Jane and Jimmy arrived. They told Tutu they could stay two hours. They seemed especially quiet, and as Sophy had a copy of a very favorite story-book under her arm, Tutu got it into her head that the children would sit quietly on the porch and listen to the story of *The Proud Girl Humbled* or of *John True*.

Tutu went up to her room with a basket of stockings to mend. There were a great many holes in the stockings that week, and mending them would take two hours at least.

The time had come.

Jimmy had brought a pocketful of matches, so there should be no hitch in the proceedings.

Dick had all the dried stems laid neatly in an old cigar-box. It made them seem like the real thing.

"We daren't smoke here on the steps, or even in the garden," said Jimmy, cautiously. "Smoke smells so, and Tutu's got the longest nose for smells that ever was made."

"The woodshed loft," suggested Sophy Jane.

"Mother never will let Chris smoke out there when he cuts the firewood," said Rachel. "And as for the barn —"

"Let's go and sit in the alley behind the barn," proposed Jimmy; "then if anybody catches us, we can run."

Dick hugged the box up to his blouse.

"If everybody isn't going to be fair, there isn't going to be any smoking," he announced. "If we're caught, we'll all be caught alike, and nobody is going to run."

Yes; they agreed to be fair.

They could have gotten into the alley by several easy ways; but there was also a hard way, over a high picket fence. They chose the hard way. The boys got over quickly and safely. Sophy Jane tore her apron, and Rachel skinned her knee. The Doctor once said that he wondered

how Rachel would look with all her skin on. Rachel could not imagine.

The boys found a board and turned it clean side up against the stable wall. Then they all sat down.

Jimmy counted out the matches: four for each; Dick counted out the stems: four for each. The rest were to be saved until the next time.

They lighted the cigars and sat in a row, puffing away.

“This is grand,” said Jimmy.

“Perfectly delicious,” sighed Sophy Jane.

Dick smoked in silence.

“I’m — not much used to it yet,” admitted Rachel. “My cigar keeps going out, and I’ve used up all my matches. Give me another, Jim.”

Jimmy had used but one of his, so he gave one to Rachel.

They could hear Tutu singing upstairs:—

“Y-e-s, I’m — glad — I’m — in — this — army,
Y-e-s, I’m — glad — I’m — in — this — army,
And I’ll battle — for — the — Lord.”

A valiant member of the Church Militant was Tutu, and she meant every word of the loud

hymn. People had not begun to talk about the strenuous life, in those days; but if ever a woman was strenuous, that woman was Tutu.

Dick smoked steadily on. He was, it was true, quite pale, and a line of pain shadowed his beautiful great eyes. He had finished two stems, and was beginning on the third.

Sophy Jane puffed away with the air of a *connoisseur*. There was but little flavor to the dried stalks; but her vivid imagination supplied all that the stem lacked. She was having a beautiful time.

Jimmy and Rachel were companions in duplicity. They hated the smoke, and their stomachs felt very queer; but they stood by their colors. Both felt that to confess to disappointment and to give up, would be unmanly. Both wished, above all things, to be manly, so they made a pretence of being charmed with their cigars.

Nobody said much, and nobody noticed that Tutu had stopped being glad she was in an army, and wishing to battle for the Lord.

The Town Clock struck three.

Jimmy sighed. There was a whole hour left of the time allotted to the visit. Would Dick

expect him to smoke all that hour? He had nearly three stems — cigars — left.

No; Dick would expect nothing. The barn-door opened and Tutu stood before them. Apparently there would be no future for any of them.

“Well, I never!” said Tutu.

The children stood up.

“You two may go along home,” said Tutu, with withering scorn. “Never mind about the extra hour. You’ve been here long enough. You can do as you like about what you tell when you get there. Dick! Rachel! I guess it ain’t worth while to wait till your Pa comes home before the whipping begins. You’ve earned one apiece, that’s certain, and I’ll take it on myself to see that you are paid here and now. Why you haven’t set yourselves and the barn afire I don’t know. ’Twould have been a pity if the *barn* had been burnt up.”

Sophy Jane and Jimmy started on the homeward trail, slowly and sadly. They could hear the loud wailing of Rachel’s voice as she received the swift reward for her evil deeds. Dick bore his punishment without a word.

“Goodness! but I’m glad that Tutu don’t live with us,” said Sophy Jane, devoutly.

Peace was restored long before the next scheme was exploited.

✓ There was to be an Election. An Election is a very exciting thing, which usually occurs in the Fall. Two men, or maybe more, wish to be something, and everybody else goes all but crazy in trying to help the one to get what he wants, and to hinder the other from doing so. ✕ There does not seem to be much sense to it, and whichever way an Election goes, the sun continues to rise and set, and the seasons to come and go much the same as before. It is always going to be the end of everything if the wrong man is elected; but somehow, even if he is, the prophesied catastrophe never comes off. ✕ It is, however, a time of great excitement for the boys.

Prior to the Election there were to be Parades, two Parades — one for each of the great political parties. The children would, it is true, look at that of the party opposed to that to which their own families belonged; but it would be with hostile eyes, and comments of an uncomplimentary nature would have been passed thereon but for the stern restrictions of the Elders. It was imperative that something

great should be done in honor of their own Parade; but to do things requires money.

The boys looked into their money boxes. Each had an allowance of spending money which was paid in on the first morning of every month. By twelve o’clock of the same day each boy was usually a bankrupt, and as it was not allowed that one either tease for more, or go in debt for anything, twenty-nine or thirty days of abject poverty ensued. These were mitigated by their system of swapping things, but still it was not pleasant, and lately they had begun to save up. Now, all told, the boys had fourteen cents. It was a bad outlook. Fifty cents was the sum required, and between fourteen and fifty there is a great gulf fixed.

Dick approached the little girls diplomatically.

“How much money have you got in your tin banks?”

“What do you want to know for?”

“Oh, just because. We’ve got a splendid scheme, and we thought maybe you’d like to be let in.” Dick walked away.

They longed to be let in.

Rachel rushed to her tin bank. It rattled

feebly. Only two cents lay between her and the wolf.

Sophy Jane went home to examine her store. Rachel went with her. Sophy had had extra expenses that month, and out of her larger allowance had saved one five-cent piece and three pennies. It was not at all likely that they would be let in for ten cents.

They went up to Molly's.

She had not heard of the new scheme, but she became wild to be let in, and began to cry when it was discovered that she had not a cent to bless herself with, and was, therefore, without hope of being noticed by the fortune-hunting gentlemen.

The Youngest Aunt came by, and asked what Molly was crying about. Learning of her destitute condition, she contributed two silver three-cent pieces to her relief. She said she had no more, or she would give one each to Rachel and to Sophy Jane. They were very sorry she had no more, and said so very politely.

Sophy Jane was always lucky. On the way down to the Doctor's she stubbed her toe and fell, and as she fell her hand touched a large copper penny that lay on the board walk. She could

hardly believe her eyes, but it was true. She forgot to cry over the fall she was so pleased with the money, and armed with seventeen cents the little girls hastened to the woodshed, where the boys were in consultation. When the boys saw all that money, they let the girls in.

“It is to be this,” explained Dick. “Our Parade is to pass here, and we are going to build an observatory under the linden tree on the corner. It will be a kind of table thing, and we shall crawl up to it by Jimmy’s step-ladder. It’s broken, and his mother said he could have it. We can get the boards and nails easy enough, and Chris will help us make it; but it’s got to be trimmed off with red, white, and blue stuff, and we’ve all got to have flags to wave when we holler. It will cost at least fifty cents to do it up in good style, and it’s got to be all right, if I have anything to do with it. I won’t have those Democrats laughing at us.”

All resolved that rather than give occasion for laughter to the Democrats, their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor should go. Paul was made treasurer, and when all had paid in, thirty-one cents lay in his pocket. Sophy

Jane borrowed a threaded needle of Tutu and sewed the pocket fast shut.

"The next thing will be to earn money," said Dick. "Let everybody think."

"I could shovel snow," said Paul, resolutely. But there was no snow.

"Last Summer I sold a basketful of peas and two squashes to Mrs. Baker," said Rachel. "Mother said I could have them out of the garden, and Mrs. Baker said she'd buy them if I would shell the peas, she had no time to bother; so I did, and she gave me fifteen cents." Pea season was long past, however, and there were no more squashes, so Mrs. Baker could not be considered as a source of revenue.

Sophy Jane felt that she would shine as a nurse-maid, but the Village mothers either took care of their own babies, or trusted them to older hands than hers, so there was no use thinking of that. Couldn't they have a Show?

All looked approvingly at Sophy Jane.

The Show came off on the Saturday next ensuing, in the large, pleasant, chip-smelling woodshed, in which, luckily, the Winter's wood was not yet stored. There were plenty of nice, thick sticks left over, to be used for seating the

audience, and in front of the double row of seats thus provided two old quilts were hung on a piece of clothes-line. Two members of the troupe, who might, at the moment, be at leisure from performing, were to hold these curtains back and display the various scenes of the *tableaux vivants*, which was the form of Show Sophy Jane had decided upon as best adapted to the resources in hand.

Paul as treasurer stood at the shed door and took in the gate money. Admission was one cent, and a goodly number of boys and girls came to the Show. In all sixteen, and really more would have been an inconvenience.

By half-past one Paul saw that every log was filled, and he left the door to take his place in the opening tableau. Sophy Jane had persuaded them that a series of Biblical scenes would take well, and would be easy to do. She wished to begin with the Garden of Eden, and have an æsthetic display of dahlias, marigolds, and other Autumn flowers; but this the boys voted down as being too tame. So the first scene was to be the Killing of Abel. Jimmy as Cain was wonderful. The Doctor’s brother, who was a Captain loaned a pair of pistols, and with one

of these in each of Jimmy's hands, with epaulets on Jimmy's shoulders, and a soldier's cap cocked fiercely above Jimmy's frowning brows, there was nothing left for poor little Paul, as Abel, to do but to fall over with a loud whoop of anguish. Sophy Jane, as Eve, pinned up in a sheet, and with a splendid wig of yellow shavings, shrieked in the background; while Dick, as Father Adam, with stern countenance and uplifted horsewhip, was about to chastise his erring first-born, when the curtain dropped, and the beholders applauded this spirited scene to the echo.

The Sacrifice of Isaac was next presented, Rachel and Molly pulling at the quilts. Dick, as Abraham, with a beard of the yellow shavings, an old hat of Grandfather's, and the Doctor's flowered dressing-gown, held a hatchet threateningly over the head of the prostrate and screaming Jimmy; while Paul, in the sheet that had just enwrapped Mother Eve, stayed the murderous hand. There had been some trouble about the ram for the sacrifice, but this had been done away by tying the family cat to a pot of rose geranium. A cat is not a ram exactly, but both are domestic animals, and the scene

was considered very realistic. One little girl said that when old Puss *meowed*, it sounded almost exactly like a sheep.

Concession was made by the actors to the actresses in the next scene, which was Jacob’s Dream. One of the boys took a very unrestful position with his head on an empty pickle jar, and snored lustily ; while up and down Jimmy’s recently acquired step-ladder the three girls clambered, one at a time. They had on their night-gowns over their dresses, and, except that their manners lacked repose, and angels’ knees are not unusually depicted as their most prominent feature, they did very well.

To represent Joseph and His Brethren required the assistance of the entire troupe, and even then several Tribes were lost before their time. Two of the spectators were asked to officiate as quilt-raisers while Joseph was on view, and also while the Children of Israel crossed the Red Sea. The Doctor’s old army blanket was the sea, and a very excellent sea it made. No one could have taken it for any other sea than the Red Sea, so red was it. Big chips were laid in a track across it, and over these Moses and Aaron led the hosts in safety. Each member of the party

blew blasts on his tin horn, so the effect was brilliant.

They had David and Goliath, and Daniel in the Lion's Den. Jimmy stuffed out with pillows made an excellent Goliath, and as there were not cats enough to make a proper den of lions, everybody but Paul, who was Daniel, put something over his head, and crawled about on all fours, growling so viciously and roaring so terribly that Daniel looked more than pleased when relief came in the unexpected appearance of the Doctor's Wife with her best silver basket filled with seed-cakes, followed by Tutu with a jug of lemonade.

It seemed almost a pity that with forty-seven cents ready in hand to be spent in decking off a grand stand for Parade day, and for the discomfiture of the Democrats, that a few days before the Parade, men who were on the Committee called at the houses of all the children and requested their active participation in a larger way. A float was to be adorned by a Goddess of Liberty enthroned, around whom white-robed States were to cluster, typifying the Union. There were to be white frocks, red caps, blue sashes bearing the names of States to be honored,

waving flags, — oh, who would not be a State? Rachel wept for joy when she found that she was to be Nevada, and ran to look for the word in her little geography. Sophy Jane, out of compliment to her parents, was to be Massachusetts, and for like reason Molly was to be Ohio. To have been Indiana, was an honor to which one dared not aspire.

The boys were honored also. In sailor suits, with shiny caps and belts, they were to man a boat which was to represent Our Navy. Our Army — a fort-looking thing — was to be defended by larger and fiercer-looking boys. It was to be simply splendid to drive slowly past admiring throngs of enthusiastic townsmen and country folk, hurrahing and hurrahed at, and even permitted by the etiquette of the occasion to yell derisively at children who were Democrats: “Hi, there! Don’t you wish you was me?”

But the money! It had been consecrated to a great cause; it must not be diverted to lower uses. It should not be.

The men who were on the Parade Committee were having a meeting. Almost all of them had been away fighting in the great war, not so far in the past, then, by many a long year, as it is

now, and on that account they wore a halo in the eyes of the children. They looked up when the Committee-room door opened, and the boys, followed at a distance by three scared little girls, came in.

Dick was a bashful boy, but he was no coward. He walked up to the table and laid the money down in orderly rows,—half-dimes, three-cent pieces, pennies—mostly pennies.

“Part we saved,” he explained, “and part we earned. Please spend it on the Parade. We want to do our share.”

The tall General put his hand on the lad’s shoulder, and his voice broke.

“It was good work fighting for the old flag, Comrades,” he said, “since we can hand it on to such as these.”

CHAPTER XI

The County Fair

SAD days had come to Sophy Jane and to Rachel. It was decreed by their elders and betters that they must learn to sew.

There was a tradition in the Village of those days, that the highest type of womanhood was that set forth in that particular chapter of the Book of Proverbs in which all the home-making, housewifely virtues are praised with the comfortable appreciation of a man who has had a good mother and a good wife. Of this commentary the verses referring to the needle were considered to be peculiarly applicable to little girls, and it was considered by grandmothers and grand-aunts to be little less than a scandal that Sophy Jane at twelve and Rachel at ten barely knew which end of the needle carried the thread. The dark hour of their initiation into the mysteries of running, hemming, felling, and so on, could now no longer be averted, and thimbles

and other implements were provided, with a hope of making less dreary the dreaded pathway.

Sophy Jane shadowed forth the New Woman.

"I don't see why we should learn," she argued. "Boys don't, and they get on very well indeed. When a girl knows how to sew, she always has to make trimmed-up things for herself, which are no good, and which it always makes her unhappy to wear. I know when I have on my best petticoat, — the one with lace and inserging that Mother made with her own hands, — I have to be so prim I wish I was dead. You needn't say, 'that's wicked,' for I do. When Sister was going to be married, she had a horrible time. She made tucks all the morning and tatting all the afternoon — miles and miles of tatting to sew on the tucks. I s'pose she's had to be careful of her things ever since, and I know that's made her miserable, for she likes fun as well as anybody; but you really *have* to have puffs and lace if you're married. If you aren't, plain hems will do very well, and Miss Banks will make things if they only have plain hems. If it's learn to sew or not be married, I've decided not to marry."

Rachel was secretly sorry to hear this. All of

the lovely princesses and charming ladies of the fairy tales she loved were married, in the *grand finale*, and she longed to follow them in all things. She longed still more to be like Sophy Jane, so she renounced the holy state of matrimony without a word.

"Yes," she responded, "I'd rather have plain hems and fun than no end of inserging, and be married and miserable. I hope Miss Banks will live forever and forever; then we need not bother."

"I wish we were boys, anyhow," went on Sophy Jane. "Nearly all the good times go their way; but we can't do this and can't do that because we're girls. I hate girls."

"Mother is a girl," reproved Daffy.

There was no escape from this burden of their sex. Sophy Jane was given the breadths of a skirt to stitch, and Rachel was set to over-and-over a pillow-case for her little bed.

Hers was indeed a weary seam. Large black knots marked the beginning of each day's task, followed by a row of stitches in many varying shades of gray, which straggled along like very raw recruits at drill, while round dots of blood spoke of many a wounded finger. It was lucky

that so wide an expanse of muslin was ready at hand to wipe away the tears of the doleful little maid, who stitched away so unwillingly through many a warm Summer afternoon.

Aunt Mary came to the rescue. The very nicest aunts seem, somehow, always to be named Mary. Perhaps some special grace of sympathy and helpfulness clings to those who bear the name made beautiful forever by a young Jewish girl, ages and ages ago.

"The pillow-case is so uninteresting, Sister Kitty," she said. "I do not wonder that the poor little thing cries over it. Send her up to the Old House, and I will give her lessons. We will keep what we are doing a great secret, dear, and we must try to work faithfully at it, so that dear Mother will not be sorry she trusted us."

It was the most beautiful secret imaginable. A large boxful of little six-sided scraps of paper covered over with every pretty sort of ribbon and satin and silk, and these were to be over-stitched together, so many every day, until there should be a sofa pillow ready for dear Mother's Christmas present. Certainly this was the royal road to the estate of the Complete

Needlewoman. The secrecy was also delightful, and was speedily shared with everybody whom Rachel knew, excepting only the Doctor's Wife, who looked as if she did not know it at all.

There were no more tears. Rachel sat by Aunt Mary's side, while Grandmother, with her knitting in her hands, told endless stories of her childhood in the Old Dominion, which would always be "home" to her longing heart. The waters of the Potomac rippled softly through those quiet tales; the shadows drifted over the noble curves of the Blue Ridge, which faded, faded, as they melted into the Valley which is the pride and glory of the Commonwealth. Rachel tried to picture to herself the rocky hillsides, where the laurel thickets flushed into white and pink blossomings; and she tried to see the tender haze that hovered over the scenes once so familiar, always so dear, to the gentle old eyes, which grew gentler still as Grandmother thought of the long, long past. We speak of looking backward; is it not looking forward that we mean?

Suddenly it was October, and time for the County Fair. Suddenly, also, all the over-and-overing was done. A gay pillow, finished to the

last stitch, lay on the shelf in Aunt Mary's closet, and Rachel was running about with another secret to tell. It was to be entered to compete for a premium at the Fair.

The boys had caught the Fair fever also, and had procured a yellow pamphlet in which the premiums were listed. They looked it over eagerly.

Horses, cattle, sheep, swine, grains, fruits, vegetables — they had none to offer. Fowls? Yes, they had fowls.

Paul had a duck, a very admirable duck, although it was a little lame. A man once gave it to him out of a farm-wagon in which he was carrying a brood of ducklings to his married daughter. One of the little ones got hurt, and the man did not know what to do with it. No one would want a lame duck, he said, yet he hated to kill the poor little thing. So he was very glad to give it to Paul, who asked him for it rather timidly. The duck had grown to be large and fat, and had been provided with a mate through the united purses of the three boys. The drake had a curled-up tail, and the most splendid neck feathers imaginable.

The boys were much attached to the ducks. They sat for hours on the bank of a weedy little

pond to which the pair had waddled and wherein they disported themselves, and they were agreed in believing that such evolutions were never before seen. It seemed to them hardly possible that another pair so interesting could anywhere be found, and to enter them for a premium seemed but a simple act of justice. So not only the sofa pillow, but the ducks also went to the County Fair.

In semi-rural communities, in the years before people had forgotten to remember that to-morrow is also a day, there was no School during Fair week. It would have been futile to attempt to hold the usual sessions, since none but "sissy" boys would have dreamed of attending, and the few girls who could have been coerced into going would have been so idle and so cross that the Teachers would have been very unhappy. They wisely ordered holiday for the whole week, and took their own pleasure in the great half-open, half-wooded enclosure wherein the whole countryside assembled to celebrate a sort of Feast of Tabernacles before the settling down of the early cold of the Northern winter should shut them in to their own firesides. It was a highly prized opportunity for the exchange of friendly greet-

ings and experiences, as well as for the rivalry that stimulates to larger effort in the way of improved agriculture and housewifery. Nothing but good could come of seeing the best possible development of the resources of the bountiful old Mother Nature, so ready with her aid, and surely in this world wherein one must perforce strive for something, to have the name of being the best butter maker, or the grower of the finest pears, or corn, or roses, or cows, is as well worth striving for as is any other goal. So the various departments were so full of interesting things that the various Committees had a hard time in selecting those worthiest of the premiums.

Sophy Jane stood entranced before a work of art called an Agricultural Wreath. It, or its duplicate, came every year to the Fair, and she knew exactly where to go to see this wonder. It was framed in a deep oval frame under glass, and it was so splendid that it would have ornamented a King's palace. It is doubtful if any King on any throne had ever such a thing as this;—perhaps nobody at all has one to-day. Large rosette-like flowers made of red or yellow corn, with tufted centres of crimson or

yellow wool, and varnished with a thick shiny varnish, were called dahlias, and contended for the places of honor with roses made out of whitey or pinky squash or melon seeds and clusters of rice-grain lilacs. Trefoils of Lima beans, ferns of unripe oats, pinnated foliage of peas — there was really no end to the ingenuity displayed by the artificer with the rather vegetable-like name of Kale who had constructed these marvels which Sophy thought so beautiful. Who could have guessed that in the years to come men and women of the highest culture would stand reverently before the work of the little girl herself?

“If I didn’t have to learn to sew, I could make a better wreath than that myself,” said Sophy Jane, with conviction.

This seemed so presumptuous to Rachel’s scandalized ears that she walked hastily away in the direction of the sofa pillow, now hanging by one corner in the department devoted to patchery. Pride was very well. She was proud of the pillow herself; but to speak as Sophy Jane had spoken of the Agricultural Wreath, was little better than sacrilege.

A lady was standing near the needle-worked things, and was examining the work critically.

She did not belong to the Village, or Rachel, who knew everybody, would have known her. Probably she was the wife of one of the well-to-do farmers whose homes lay under the shelter of the woods that dotted and bordered the rolling prairies. She had a kindly face, and seemed greatly interested in the display before her.

Rachel approached her cautiously.

"Are you on the Committee?" she asked.

"Yes, little girl."

"I am sorry for that," said Rachel, politely. "I was just going to ask you if you did not think that sofa pillow was very well done for a little girl just learning to sew. Somebody I know made it. She's ten, going on 'leven, but she's nearer 'leven than ten, and she sewed as hard as ever she could to get it done in time for the Fair. Aunt Mary hardly helped her at all, only she did the basting. If she gets the premium, I'm going to — but if you're the Committee, the little girl must not try to influence you. Dick says if anybody influences the Committee, she's got to go to jail. I should hate being shut up in a dark cell full of robbers and murderers, shouldn't you?"

Yes; the lady thought that might be very disagreeable.

“Our boys have entered the ducks,” she went on confidentially. “They’re splendid ducks, only Martha Washington is lame. General Washington has the *splendidest* feathers, and they can both quack like anything. I am almost sure they’ll get the premium, and then if I get — oh! I forgot you were on the Committee. You wouldn’t call what I’ve said influencing? You wouldn’t want to send me to jail for it, would you?”

No, indeed. Nothing was farther from the lady’s thoughts. She patted the thin little cheek kindly, and walked away. Rachel felt sure that any one so nice would never be instrumental in sending her to jail, so she too moved off toward the other end of the Pavilion.

The Pavilion was a large shed, unpainted and rough. Crayon portraits, and landscapes, and flower pieces in oil and water colors, were hanging against the walls; while on tables and on ropes stretched for the purpose hung all of the knitted and patched quilts and things, and beyond these were displays of every sort of good-tasting stuff that ever was heard of, — jelly,

pickles, preserves, bread and cake, butter like ingots of gold, rounds of delicious-looking cheeses, jugs of home-made cider, bottles of home-made wines, festoons of home-cured hams, boxes of home-grown honey. It made one's mouth water merely to look at them, and it really was no proper place for a hungry child. When one grew up, one would be placed on a Committee, and have the right to taste anything and everything; but it seemed a long time to wait, and it seemed surprising that when Committees could eat a whole plateful, they should take only such tiny bites. On the previous day one of the tasting ladies had given Sophy Jane a large slice of pound cake, and after she had taken the precaution of eating it to the last crumb, she went forth and boasted of her good fortune; but although her comrades made all due haste to place themselves as near to the tasters as they could get, no more gifts were forthcoming. To-day, as all the awards had been announced, there was nothing to be expected in the Pavilion; however, as luncheon was to be served at noon in the Linwood rockaway, it was not so trying to look at the good things beyond one's reach.

All of the carriages were grouped about under the trees of the oak grove which lay along the race track. The horses had been led away to the feeding-sheds, and in the vehicles the hostesses were uncovering their baskets. The children were wedged in between their elders and gorged themselves, the early start, the excitement, and the crisp air of the royal October weather having given their appetites an extra edge. Never were pleasanter feasts than were the basket feasts of the County Fair times. One had not only one's own supply of fried chicken, sandwiches, fruit, hard-boiled eggs, and every sort of cake ever thought of; but people from adjoining carriages were constantly handing pots of damson preserve or baskets of luscious grapes, over the carriage wheels, and one handed back plates of delicately sliced ham, or jars of spiced gooseberries. Recipes for this or that were exchanged with the return of empty dishes, and compliments were both generous and sincere. No one in or about the Village saw cause for shame in honest appetite, or was chary of honest praise. It was a sign of good breeding to praise a hostess, delicately, on the success of her dishes;

and it was a sign of breeding even better than good, for ladies to make an opportunity to tell the cook how much they appreciated her efforts to give pleasure. No one ever discussed the servant problem in the Village, since there was none to discuss, only a kind and helpful relationship between mistress and maid at once beautiful and wise.

After the baskets were repacked, the older ladies and the smaller children settled themselves comfortably to look at the races,—the men, the larger children, and the young girls old enough to have sweethearts to take care of them, choosing to move about, and get better views.

It was all very interesting. Jockeys who wore gay caps sat lightly on horses which pranced and curveted proudly before the admiring crowds, or strained every muscle in the wild dash they made as they flashed around the track to the goal. Other men, crouched in spidery little sulkies, drove their horses around the well-watered oval, urging them on to their best efforts with low cries, or a touch of the long, thin lashes they carried. The winning horses were quickly blanketed, and led away to be rubbed down, fol-

lowed by as many boys as could tear themselves away from the palings before the Grand Stand — palings erected, it would seem, expressly to be a boy-perch. Then with much ding-donging of the starter's bell, with many false starts and swift recalls, new horses would trot off to make their records. Perhaps there was a little betting among some of the younger men; but openly there was nothing to offend, nothing but a fair testing of wind and limb and of skilful training.

While the races were at their height, the boys bethought themselves of their ducks. What if the premiums had been awarded since they took a last look at noon? It would be well to see at once, so they darted off in the direction of the shed in which the coops were arranged, and whence a clamor of quacking, gobbling, crowing, clucking, squawking, and cooing could be heard far and wide.

There was only disappointment in store for the boys. The ducks had been judged, and neither the blue ribbon for best, the red ribbon for the next best, nor even the yellow tag for honorable mention were for them. All had been awarded to dwellers in the next tier. Neither General Washington nor his wife minded it in

the least, however. They quacked joyfully when they saw their little masters, and ruffled out their resplendent plumage as proudly as possible.

It would not be speaking truthfully to say that the boys did not resent this slight, and they would probably have grown very much excited but for something which happened just at that moment.

Next to the duck pens were stages on which coopsful of chickens stood, and among these some very fine fowls were to be seen. The boys had especially admired the Plymouth Rocks. The best display of these belonged to a farmer living out beyond Linwood, a very honest farmer, who had well earned the title he bore throughout the whole prairie of being a "clever neighbor" — clever in the good old sense of being helpful and kindly. He had shown this quality in the readiness with which he promised every one who asked for them a sitting of Plymouth Rock eggs, and one of his first promises had been to the boys who now intended to become poultry fanciers on as large a scale as possible. He said he did not wish to make money off his friends, and that he should only charge regular table-egg prices for his fine Plymouth Rock eggs.

The boys thought they could safely engage four sittings of eggs, and the farmer said if they meant four, he meant five, so everybody was pleased.

Another man had Plymouth Rocks also. He did not belong to the Village or to its neighborhood, but the boys knew his face. It was not a nice face, for his eyes were of a pale watery blue, and were constantly shifting. One cannot help the color of one's eyes; but if one has an honest heart, one is apt to have steady eyes. This man's eyes were not honest, and it had not been becoming in him to stand about and disparage other people's chickens in the way he had done.

When the boys came suddenly around the corner, they were surprised to find the man busily engaged in trying to force the lock of Mr. Fieldwood's coop, which now bore the blue ribbon. The fowls themselves seemed to know that danger was near, for they were huddled together in a frightened way at the farther end of the coop. Chickens may be stupid, but even they know when a bad man is about.

"That's not your coop, Mister," called Dick.

The man faced about. He looked angrily at

the boys, and then he began to smile in a coaxing way.

"Oh, yes it is, my little man."

"It's Mr. Fieldwood's, you mean," retorted Jim. "We know him very well. He's going to give us a whole sitting of eggs next Spring."

"He'll bile 'em first, so's they won't hatch," sneered the man. "If I was you, I'd rather have ten cents to spend to-day 'n a promise of suthin' half a year off. Wouldn't you like to have ten cents?"

He held up a slip of green paper, which meant ten cents in those days.

"No, sir," said the boys.

"Come, now. An' you mustn't say these chickens is his'n. We traded places for our coops this mornin', an' these here prize-winners is mine, every feather of 'em."

"Dick," said Paul, suddenly, "I know better. I remember that nice little hanging-up waterpan, don't you? Mr. Fieldwood said he fixed it himself. I asked him where he got it, 'cause it's the only one I ever saw."

The man began to look angry.

"You clear out o' here," he said, roughly. "Like's not you've come sneakin' in here to

steal suthin', 'n' if you don't show a clean pair o' heels this minute, I'll call the constable. Look sharp, now."

"Run and fetch Mr. Fieldwood, Paul," said Dick. "Jim and I'll stay here. Let that lock alone!"

"I've a right to lock up my own coop, you little wretch!"

"But you've no right to touch other people's. If what you say is true, you'd only be too glad to wait till Mr. Fieldwood comes. He's only over by the sheep."

When the man heard this, he said some very ugly words, and he gave the lock a vicious wrench. It was only an old lock, and now it broke. As it broke, Paul returned, panting, followed by the farmer.

"These here lyin' little thieves," began the man.

"Not one word," said Mr. Fieldwood, sternly. "You don't know these boys, or the stock they come of, or you'd never use such words about them. If there's liars and thieves about, and I guess there is, it ain't them. I'm surprised at you. I didn't think the old County had any of your sort. What were you meaning to do: kill

my chickens, or steal them? I reckon it's my bounden duty to let folks know about this — but — there —! You take and load up your chickens and clear out, and never do you set foot on the Fair grounds again, and I guess we'll let you off."

The man shuffled away, and presently he returned with a little wagon, into which he lifted his coops. The Plymouth Rocks were very creditable birds, who looked ashamed of their master, although his deeds were no fault of theirs. A thin little woman with an anxious, frightened face held the horse while the man was at work. She looked piteously from her husband to Mr. Fieldwood, but she said nothing. She looked back over her shoulder as they drove away.

"Poor soul!" said the farmer, and then he turned to the boys:—

"You needn't wait for Spring for your chickens, my lads. That young cockerel, and those two pullets are yours right here and now. The poor fellow's punished enough, I hope, being found out in a mean trick like that, so there's no need for any of us to spread tales. Breath don't last so long with any of us that we need waste it

speaking evil of others. That poor little woman of his!"

A rooster and two hens! And out of the premium coop! And just for nothing at all, one might say! The boys were shamefaced enough with their mumbled thanks, but they were jubilant with pride directly they were alone.

The Fair was over. In the mellow sunlight of the still autumnal day, people drove homeward, tired and happy. Christmas was antedated by two months, as Rachel, in the effervescence of her joy, presented the sofa pillow adorned with the bluest of blue ribbons to the Doctor's Wife, and danced madly about with the greenest of one-dollar notes in her hand. The boys were sternly arraigned at the bar of Tutu's justice when they came lagging in, carrying the Plymouth Rocks in a basket.

"He *gave* them to you? What for? You didn't *beg*?"

"No'm," said the boys.

CHAPTER XII

The Conquest of Apollyon

It would almost seem as if a perpetual sunshine flooded the Village; but even there the trees were not always clothed with the pride of their Midsummer green, nor were the song-sparrows always trilling their simple litany of love and faith in the fields that lay about it. Often and often, in after years and in alien places, when the children, looking backward, listened, in fancy, for the mellow thunder of the wings of nesting swallows in the old chimney at home, or waited for a breath of lilac against the cheek, they remembered that even there it was not always lilac-tide, and that sometimes it was only the Winter wind that sang over the chimney.

Winter began, properly speaking, when walnuts were ripe, and when Saturdays were Saturdays no longer, but Walnut days.

To the intense disgust of Sophy Jane and Rachel, girls were not permitted to share in this

sport. It would spoil their hands, their mothers said. To this unreasonable reason the little girls replied with a display of hands so scratched and stained and weather-beaten, that it seemed hardly possible that further injury could befall them. This unlucky exhibition only fortified the two mothers in their decision; so the boys went alone to the deep rich woods, and came back at nightfall laden with nuts, quite unhampered by the presence of girls.

Before walnuts ripen there must be a heavy frost, and even after a light frost the leaves begin to change their colors and to fall. Then it is really Winter, although there are days and even weeks when the still air is a mellow haze through which the lingering sunshine falls on the Village maples. Red and crimson, russet and gold, they stand in the brooding light that transforms the familiar streets into a New Jerusalem, and whether one is in the body or not, matters little; one is conscious only of the glory and the splendor, and the tender melancholy of the Fall.

When leaves are fallen, Bonfire time begins. Even in these latter days it is a season by itself, like Apple-blossom-time, or Harvest; but on the Day before Yesterday it was the Year's high

carnival — waited for, planned for, during the long, hot weeks of the inland Summer, and for many days scenting the still air with the peculiar, evasive odors of the smoke of burning leaves.

At the Old House there were only pine trees, which kept their slender needles to fight the frost with all through the snowy days, near at hand, so there was no Bonfire there. Sophy Jane and Jimmy postponed theirs until after the Oak House festival, so the children made a combined assault upon the Doctor's wealth of leaves, and Dick's Bonfire was the event of the season. It was always Dick's Bonfire, no matter how many helpers he had.

The yard was divided off into districts, and rakes were provided. It would have been hard work to rake off so many leaves but for the game they made out of it, and the fun and romping of the long, bright holiday. They made forts of leaves, and carried them with wild charges of shoutings and laughter. They made ambushes, and played at being Indians, with fierce whoops and blood-curdling yells of defiance, and they buried each other under rustling piles. The little girls would have been glad to deck themselves with chaplets and wreaths of the many-

tinted beauties; but this took so much time, and was so essentially feminine, that after a little jeering on the part of those whose opinions, however tyrannical or however wrong, had always the advantage of being masculine, they left off wishing to adorn themselves, and raked and jumped and shouted as lustily as the boys.

Other boys came. At first they stood about, with their hands in their pockets, and offered advice. Then they joined the assault or defence of the forts, and added the strength of their lungs to the war-whooping. Sooner or later, however, Dick had them carrying baskets of leaves out into the open street. The country folk who drove into town to do their week-end errands, drove on the farther side of the road when they saw that Dick was arranging his Bonfires. This was very considerate of them; but they all knew Dick, and they all felt rewarded when they saw the pleased look on his face, although he did not otherwise express his thanks.

The leaves were piled into four great heaps, and the freed grass shone green with the pleasure of being able to look about once more, although had the foolish grass but known it, a

warm blanket of the good leaves had been very comfortable a little later on. The Cousins had spent the day, and were to be sent home at late bedtime. Sophy Jane and Jimmy were to remain to the Bonfire tea. Tutu had made the dearest little jumbles, and there were to be minced chicken, and biscuits, and honey, and raspberry jam.

The Bonfires were to be lighted in succession—one, two, three, four. Four was the largest of all. It was named for the Doctor, the others being called after the other reigning household powers,—Mary Baily, Tutu, and the Doctor's Wife.

It seemed as if night would never come, but finally it did. The sun sank behind the western woods, and the soft, purple darkness sifted down from the skies. Venus showed her large, lambent flame; a thin sickle of a moon peeped through the bared boughs.

A good many boys stood about, but for the most part they said nothing, only looking on, with their hands in their pockets as usual. The girls sat on the carriage block. Dick had the match-box.

"I say," ventured one boy, "why don't you

have some real fun with your fire? If it was mine, I'd put some powder under the leaves, and show you a thing or two."

"But it isn't yours," replied Dick.

"I could get you a cartridge or two out of my brother's drawer," insinuated the boy. "He was in the war, and he ain't afraid of a little powder, nor me neither."

"That's all right," answered Dick. "When you have a Bonfire, you can do what you like with it. This suits me."

The boy looked angrily at Dick. His name was Anthony, and his father was a drunken tailor. The Doctor's Wife usually made some excuse to call Dick in when she saw Anthony about. Now Anthony lurked away.

There was a thrill of excitement. Dick struck a match and held it to the wad of waste-paper Paul held in his hand.

The match went out.

The second match went better. The boys made a little cave in the side of the first leaf mound, Jim stood close to keep off a possible breeze, and the little girls held their breath.

A tiny wreath of pale blue smoke, then a puff of white, then a thin tongue of quivering scarlet,

and then, oh! then, the splendor of the leaping flames as the leaves were glorified and changed and passed into a new life through the smoke and the fire, the quivering heat, the whirling sparks, and the graying, whitening ashes.

Mary Bailly smiled over the gate as she watched her namesake flame and fade.

"The likes of that for a cross old Irish girl like me!" she marvelled. "It's a proud woman I am this night, Dick, me darlin', and it's yourself's the rale gintleman to think of givin' me namesake such a fine wake, — God rest all Christian sows! I must run in, now, and see to me supper, and may the Lord love ye all for a set of fine childer."

Tutu came out to view the hecatomb erected in her honor. She had her apron full of sugar cakes, so the second Bonfire was an even greater success than the first had been. Anthony came sauntering back just before the cakes were distributed. No one saw him come out of the shadow but Dick, who looked at him earnestly. Why had he come from the eastward, when his home lay at the western end of the street, — the end nearest to the first Bonfire?

The little girls were wild with delight. Sophy

Jane and Rachel screamed and gesticulated. Molly sat dumb with rapture on the carriage block. Daffy and Betty had scrambled down and had joined the boys. Daffy took Dick's hand, and looked up trustfully into his face. She was beginning to be afraid of the night, and of the flames, but by his side she felt safe. His dark face glowed, and the dancing firelight showed his great unfathomable eyes. He looked down at his little sister and gave her one of his rare smiles. No words were needed when Dick smiled.

The third Bonfire was a thing of the past. The foundry whistles blew for six o'clock, and the streets were thronged with workmen going home to their well-earned Sunday's rest. Some had empty dinner-pails in their hands and pipes between their teeth. Most of the men were hurrying supperward, but a few stopped to see the fires.

A little careless now, Dick approached the last heap of leaves, — the one named for the Doctor, and which the silent little son hoped would be the best of all. He scratched the match, and without letting go of Daffy's hand, flung it among the dry leaves. Jimmy had run into the office to call the Doctor to the door, and the

pale, handsome face of the Doctor's Wife showed at the window.

There was a horrible moment when the universe seemed rent into ten thousand fragments, and a noise louder than the loudest thunder crashed about the ears of the blinded, shrieking, terrified children. No one knew what had happened until Daffy fell suddenly forward, a bleeding, helpless little figure, which strong arms lifted instantly from the threatening flame and carried into the house.

Before morning they knew that Daffy would live, and that there would be no marring of the pretty face of the little girl who had been so cruelly hurt by the bursting cartridges placed there, — they knew only too well, — by Anthony — Anthony, who was in far worse plight than his unconscious victim; Anthony, who had been carried home stunned and bleeding; Anthony, whose hand was against the whole world, and to whom no love or sympathy was given.

It was not until the next day that the Doctor's family heard news of him.

"It is an ugly wound," said the Doctor, gravely. "And I am very much afraid of the fever that is rising."

"I hope he will die," said Dick.

"My son!"

"Yes, sir. I do. He tried to kill Daffy, and if he gets killed himself, it will be only just."

"He did not try to kill Daffy. He only thought of annoying you by a great explosion. People have very mistaken ideas on many subjects — especially of what is just."

"All the same I hope Anthony will die," reiterated Dick.

Daffy was herself again directly, a little heroine upon whom all sorts of nice things were lavished. She was taken to drive; she was fed with dainties; she was showered with flowers and toys. Beside being a dear little child whom everybody loved, the Doctor and his wife had lived lives of such unselfish goodness that people were only too glad to repay kindness with kindness. The overflow of Daffy's high tide of fortune reached as far as Sophy Jane, and the boys all but had dyspepsia from their share of the crumbs that fell from her table.

"Anthony is very, very ill," said the Doctor. "His father is rarely sober and his mother is almost broken down with sorrow and poverty and this new burden. His fever is gone, and he

needs better nourishment than he is likely to get, poor fellow! I wish, my dear, that you would send some chicken broth and a little basket of nice things to tempt him. Dick will take them."

"No, sir, please."

"I do not think I understand you. Do you know that even yet Anthony may die?"

"I hope he will."

"Dick," said the Doctor, sternly, "we may as well have a few plain words now and have done. Do you honestly think that Anthony's sin is as great as your own? You have hatred and murder in your heart. It seems to me a small thing that your hands are clean."

It was the Doctor who fought his bravest for the life that seemed of little value to others. It was the Doctor's Wife who sat hour by hour at the poor bedside, and shifted pillows, and bathed hot hands, and told endless stories. It was Tutu who carried the basket of dainties, day after day. It was the little sisters who loaned their favorite story-books, and saved their pocket money for oranges for the sick boy. Dick uttered no word of sympathy, but went about with angry and revengeful thoughts.

The Doctor watched his little son anxiously, and through many and many a lonely hour his heart ached sorely for him. There was an odd reserve about the lad which made the father pause with reverence before the unopened portals of the young soul which was facing its first encounter with the old, bitter problem of the two natures which are the heritage of every son of man. Would evil conquer? Would good? Alone the boy must fight the battle if he would come out of it with any strength worth the having.

The weeks passed. Frost came. Snow came. Thanksgiving came and went; so did Christmas and New Year's Day. The air was filled with the sweet clamor of sleigh-bells; the white streets were gay with the sleds of the children; the black ice of the beautiful ponds was smooth for the feet of the skaters.

The children had a new book. It was a book of Arctic adventures, and was one of the gifts of Christmas-tide. They could hardly eat, they were so anxious to read and reread its fascinating pages. As far as possible they altered their lives, speech, and thoughts to suit polar conditions, nor were they long in devising a new

game to which the bitter cold and deep snows of a memorable January lent their aid.

The vegetable garden was the Arctic Circle, and by dint of much labor, and with the assistance of nightly frosts, the long garden-path was flooded and frozen into an Arctic Sea. The asparagus bed made a very good Greenland, and a gilt-paper star tacked to a lath made an admirable North Pole. Snow was rolled into balls, and built into a domed dwelling, which could be entered through a snow tunnel, if one were gifted, as indeed all the children were, in the gentle art of crawling on the stomach. Two or three old buffalo-robcs were borrowed from the stable, and Harry, always ready to help on a good cause, was trained to drag the sled over hummocks which had once been onion patches or squash hills. *Cachés* were placed with thrifty frequency, and into these all the food that could be secreted from breakfast was hidden. A *caché* had to be opened now and then, when hunger pressed, and the flavor of frozen sausages and apples was loudly praised. It was to be a most realistic play, and the children could hardly wait for Saturday to come.

Dick was coming home from school on Friday

noon. He had his sled with him,—a strong, fine sled, with his name painted upon its red surface. He was rosy with exercise; his lithe little body quivered with the life within that responded to the brave call of the cold, sharp air. He had just reached his own gate when he looked up and saw Anthony.

The boy was walking slowly. He was wrapped up almost to his eyes, which looked out of gaunt hollows above his thin cheeks. Pain, Weakness, Poverty,—all these three great Angels spoke for him who spoke no word for himself.

Dick looked at Anthony, and suddenly, as if they had never been, all the hatred and bitterness he had cherished were slain. He was ashamed of his cowardice in wishing worse to one already so hardly off. He was alive—alive forever—to the call of that universal brotherhood which he had scorned. It was a crucial moment, but all he said was:—

“Hey-oh, Anthony!”

“Hey-oh!”

“If you’re going home, it’s a little down hill most of the way, and you may as well try my sled. She’s a ripper.”

“I guess I ain’t strong enough to pull her back.”

“Who said anything about pulling back? I’m going to catch on behind.”

Arrived at Anthony’s door, Dick said:—

“We’re going to have a new game in our garden to-morrow, — Arctic explorers. We’ve got a snow house built and everything you can think of. Wouldn’t you like to be the Esquimau chief? He’s to wear a buffalo-robe, and Harry’s to pull him about on the sled. The girls are to be in the game, too. Daffy’s going to be a kind of pappoose.”

It was now Anthony’s turn to think of things. Boys do not explain their thoughts, so all Anthony said was:—

“Yep! I’ll come.”

At supper-time the children were full of excitement. Tutu was forced to keep a vigorous lookout lest all the tea-biscuit be added to the treasures of the *cachés*. She had already confiscated two from Rachel’s apron pocket. They were talking of a feat just accomplished by each in turn,—a most gratifying feat. One had crawled in through the tunnel so far that one’s head and trunk were well inside the snow house. A safety match had then been lighted, and one had seen the glittering ice of the domed roof.

One would have liked more than that brief glacial moment, but one's heels were pulled from behind, and one was loudly admonished not to be a pig and take more than a fair turn. Even Daffy had had her share of the performance.

"Who are in the game?" asked the Doctor.

"Jim and Paul and Sophy Jane and Molly are to be explorers," explained Rachel. "Daffy and Betty and I are to be squaws and pap-pooes. Harry is going to be a whole dog-train, all by himself. We were going to have the two cats for reindeers, and Paul made them a nice little *corral*, but they scratched so, we've had to leave them out. Dick is to be the Esquimau chief."

"No," corrected Dick, "Anthony is."

"Anthony!" exclaimed the Doctor, in a voice of surprise and content. "Anthony!"

"Yes, sir," said Dick.

CHAPTER XIII

The Red Astrakhans

GRANDPA came into town quite early that day. He drove old Robin, and sat in a little, light-running wagon. The *Tribune*, neatly folded, was sticking out of his pocket, as he stopped at Oak House door to see if all went well with his daughter and the little ones. He had looked at the head-lines of the paper, directly the newsdealer handed it to him, and had learned from them that the end of the world had not yet arrived. Like other men of his day he was never quite sure of it until the *Tribune* made its daily announcement — in effect — that the trusty little planet was still turning and whirling on its ordered pathway.

Grandpa brought an invitation for all the family to spend the day following at Linwood, — Tutu, Mary Baily, and all. It was not his idea that the good times were all for himself and his friends only. The faithful old servants enjoyed

a day in the country now and then, as well as anybody, and they were asked sometimes when the family was asked. They sat on the porch that overlooked the grassy barnyard, and they walked in the orchard and in the woods. When the day was fine, in Summer, they had dinner on the porch. It was a treat to Bridget to have them come.

The children jumped for joy. They went to Linwood every week of their lives, and they knew every blade of grass in all its broad acres; but each visit was as great an event as if it had been a first voyage into foreign countries. Perhaps it was an even greater delight than that would have been.

Grandpa had further news. Rachel was to go home with him and spend the night. This, likewise, happened often. Daffy was too little to leave dear Mother, and Dick was a boy, and boys are sometimes an inconvenience, so it was always Rachel who stayed all night. She slept on a couch in Grandma's room, and in the morning played 'possum when Grandpa called her to breakfast.

Then Grandpa would say:—

“I must see if this little 'possum loves water.”

And then a little gentle sprinkling of water-drops would fall on Rachel's head. Then there was great fun.

So Rachel jumped harder than ever when she heard that she was to spend the night. She could hardly be made to hold still while a clean dress was put on and her hair was brushed. It was very short hair, as short, in fact, as hair could possibly be; but it was always out of order, and Tutu seemed to live with a brush in her hand. The back of the brush felt quite hard when she used it for thumping. To-day Rachel hardly noticed the thumps.

Grandma kept a little nightgown and the necessary brushes at Linwood in readiness for such occasions, so there was no need for delay. Everybody was kissed good-by, and Rachel climbed up on the seat beside Grandpa with a mind full of joyous anticipations.

It was a pleasant August day — yes; it was certainly in August, for Grandpa told Dick that the Strawberry-apples were ripe, and they ripen late in August. Dick at once decided that he could not wait until the next day before he had a taste of the Strawberry-apples, and so Grandpa told him to jump in. He could get a ride back

to town in the afternoon. Daffy looked quite forlorn until her mother promised to take her up to play with Betty: then she cheered up.

Robin jogged slowly along, and one by one the familiar homes and gardens fell behind them, as they neared the open country. Dick held the reins and imagined that he was driving, but Robin would have jogged slowly along just the same if there had been no reins.

The children were very quiet. Grandpa seemed to have forgotten all about them, and was humming softly to himself. When he hummed that tune, and looked off over the fields he loved, with his large, gentle eyes, the children were hushed as in the presence of some great and wonderful mystery. Their first knowledge of the mighty powers, Love and Death, came to them with the refrain of the old-fashioned song:—

“Where are the days when our hearts knew no care
Long, long ago—long, long ago?
Vanished, alas!—and the Past echoes “where?”
Long, long ago, long ago.”

Mother had told them that then the faithful old lover was thinking of the bride of his youth, their beautiful girl-grandmother of whom he sometimes spoke to them in a voice so full of

love and longing that their hearts were warm with a sympathy they could but dimly understand. Long years before she had gone into a World better fitted than this for one so gentle, so lovely, and so pure, and now it is long years, again, since he went to find her there.

They looked at the old man, and they made up their minds never again to be unworthy of the trust he had in them. Other people scolded them, and even punished them, but Grandpa never even suspected that *her* grandchildren could do anything amiss!

Arrived at Linwood, and the greetings from old Major, and from Bridget over, they heard more news. One of the Grand-aunts had driven out and taken Grandma to spend the day with still another Grand-aunt, — the one who lived at Locust Lane. They would be back to early tea, and Bridget was to have supper ready for all, an extra good supper — fried chicken, and waffles, and quince preserves. Rachel certainly was in luck!

Bridget liked Rachel well enough, but she liked Dick better. He was not so messy, and had not such a passion for bringing into the house the things Bridget called "thrash." She

saw that Dick looked discomfited that the waffles were not to appear until supper-time, so she promised him that apple-dumplings with plenty of cream should be ready for dinner as well as the delicate custard and sponge cake that Grandma had ordered.

Grandpa sat down in his big chair by the window, and unfolded his *Tribune*. Some little red volumes of the works of Swedenborg lay on the window ledge. Before he put on his spectacles he said to the children:—

“The dew is off the grass now, so you may run in the Orchard and play. You may have any apples you find lying on the grass, but you must not pick any of the Red Astrakhans. Grandma wants those.”

There never was another Orchard like that one. There never will be another. All the year around it was a Paradise. It sloped away to a deep dim woodland. It was hedged about with a quickset hedge where birds nested, and where rabbits and mice and ground-squirrels were safely hidden. The earliest Spring found its peach trees ready with their rose-pink gowns, and its cherry and pear trees with their filmy veils of silver, waiting for her call. Nowhere, in all the world,

was May so fairly greeted as there where millions of apple blossoms garlanded her pathway and poured their incense at her feet. Violets and buttercups and dandelions grew in the long blue-grass, and three-cornered trilliums, dancing Dutchman's breeches, and clouds of pale blue phlox blooms lurked along the woodward hedges. No monarch upon earth had such an orchestra as that protected by the gentle owner of the trees on which the earliest thrushes greeted the gray dawn, and from which the last robin-call floated upward toward the evening star. In full-leaved Summer-time, in deep-fruited Autumn, or in the white stillness of the Winter's snows — no; there was never an Orchard like that one.

Under the Strawberry-apple tree there were already many fallen apples. They were not very large, or very sweet, or very juicy, but they were of a tempting, dark purple-crimson color, and were altogether worthy of Bridget's opinion that they were "uncommon tasty grand little apples for the childer," and the childer in question ate so many that one would have thought there would be no room for the promised dumplings. There was, however, and there

was room for a wandering desire that led them from the Strawberry-apple way of safety to the Red Astrakhan path of danger.

The Red Astrakhans hung on a young tree in its first year of bearing. The fruit was not abundant, but it was large and beautiful, red, with touches of yellow, and looked to be as juicy as the Strawberry-apples were dry.

Grandpa had said that they might have any fruit found lying on the grass. There was none on the grass. The most faithful searching could not find so much of an ant-nibbled rind as might give one an idea of how a Red Astrakhan tasted.

It was an easy tree to climb, a very easy tree, even for a girl far less expert in the art of climbing than was Rachel. Grandpa had particularly told them, however, not to pick any apples, so there would be no use in climbing.

The longer they stayed under the tree, the harder it seemed that they should not taste of those alluring apples which seemed to wink at them tauntingly from among the leaves.

Dick proposed flight.

"Let's go down and play in the rick-yard," he said.

"No," replied Rachel, "let's sit right down

here. Very probably some of the apples'll drop off 'most any minute. Let's wait."

So they sat down and waited—maybe five minutes. No apples fell.

Some freshly cut bean-poles lay in a neat pile against the garden fence.

"If I were to take a bean-pole and bang at that lowest apple, I bet it'd fall off," suggested Rachel.

"Mother told you not to say 'I bet,'" corrected Dick.

"Well, I *do* bet—a thousand dollars," insisted Rachel. "I'll just show you."

"You haven't got a thousand dollars," demurred Dick. "And Grandpa said we shouldn't pick the apples."

"I never said a word about picking," retorted Rachel. "I said 'bang.'"

"It's all the same," said Dick, gloomily.

"Well, I'm going to do it, anyhow, Mr. 'Fraid Cat," said Rachel, stoutly. "I'm just as particular about obeying as you are, 'cause if you don't obey, you'll go to the Bad Place when you die. Grandpa never opened his mouth about banging, and I don't call it wicked if you *do*."

She scrambled up and possessed herself of a

stout hickory pole. She had to go within range of the bay-window to get it, but she strolled by with great *nonchalance*, and returned trailing the pole carelessly after her. Grandpa's head was quite hidden by the *Tribune*. It was just as well, perhaps, that Grandma was dining out.

She got back in safety to the tree, and took up a position on the side farthest from the house. She raised the pole and aimed at the tree.

A good many leaves were cut and fell groundward before an apple came off, but Rachel could aim very well for a girl, and finally an apple dropped.

Eve now took a large bite. It was, indeed, a fine, juicy apple. She held it Adam-ward.

"Have a bite, Dick. Half's yours."

"Grandpa —"

"Oh, bother!" cried Eve, whose thin cheek was now rounded out by the second bite, and whose utterance was rather thick. "Didn't it fall down, and didn't I pick it up off the grass? You saw it yourself. And all Grandpa said was that we could have what we picked up off the grass."

Even without a serpent, and in the most Para-

disiacal of Orchards two children and an apple can rehearse the oldest of the Hebrew dramas.

Rachel banged again and again. She forgot everything but the joy of the chase, and the lust of conquest. Five — six — nine splendid Red Astrakhans lay under the tree when Grandpa came out to call the children to dinner.

He had no suspicions. They offered no explanations, and he did not see the hickory pole.

“All those apples?” he marvelled. “I did not think any had fallen. Have you eaten all you wished to? Then put the rest in your apron, Rachel, and carry them into the house for Grandma.”

Bridget gave one quick glance at the hot little face as they all came into the cool dining room.

“That Rachel,” she muttered, as she went out to fetch the dumplings. One of them had not turned out very well. Rachel got that one.

After dinner the children went out into the barnyard. Robin was there, walking about, but the other horses were away at work. Yarrow grew there in white drifts under the locust trees. Rachel was very fond of the bitter scent of bruised yarrow leaves, and she loved the heads of little starry blossoms, but to-day she did not

feel like making a yarrow-ball. Usually there were only too many things to do in the barnyard, but on this day there seemed to be nothing at all.

The fowls walked about pecking and clucking. It would be fun to hunt for their eggs, for although a comfortable hen-house with rows of boxes was provided for the hens, only the oldest and most unimaginative ones were content with them, and it was as good as a puzzle to find out where the other hens had laid their eggs. More than once Dick had found great stores of these under the barns and stables. They were usually addled, and of no use, but to find them was an event.

Grandpa had not many rules,—very few; but one of them was against hunting eggs before four o'clock. No one knew why, but such was his pleasure.

"I can't stay until four o'clock," said Dick. "All the town-going wagons will have gone in by that time, and I should have to walk. I wish we could hunt the eggs now."

Rachel went back to the dining room to look at the clock. It seemed to be slow on purpose. Rachel had often noticed that trick it had. Or

else it went too fast. Four? No; it was only half-past one. Tick! tock! At that rate one would be an old woman before four o'clock should have come.

Dick kicked his heels disconsolately against the barn steps when Rachel came out with the bad news.

"I wish I hadn't come until to-morrow," he said.

Rachel longed to comfort him.

"Perhaps it would save Grandpa time if we hunted a few," she suggested; "the hardest ones, you know. We could put the eggs we found into the hen-house nests, and he could find them when he comes with the basket. Grandpa's getting old."

"We've disobeyed once already," hinted Dick, darkly.

"We didn't really pick," insisted Rachel. "We only banged." And then she added: "That is, I banged. You only ate."

"It was just as bad," said Dick. Dick was always fair.

"I'm glad I did it, anyhow," said the light-hearted Rachel. "The apples look lovely in the china bowl by the clock, and it'll be a surprise

for Grandma. And I think it'll be real kind of us to sort of surprise Grandpa about the eggs. Come on, Dick."

So Dick came on. The hens had been very industrious and there were a great many eggs; so many that when they were arranged in the hen-house nests, it looked like sitting-time. Even Grandpa would hardly be deceived by such a remarkable state of affairs. The thought of restoring the eggs to their proper places never occurred to the children who stood aghast at the prospect of detection.

Rachel's brain worked with fatal quickness.

"Do you remember the fun we had with the spoiled eggs once? We took them out into the wood lot behind the barn and played war. We made out the barn was a fort, and the tub we sat in was a battle ship, and we bombarded the fort. It was lots of fun. Let's do it again. Nobody ever goes into the wood lot, and Grandpa's got plenty of eggs, anyhow."

She had already filled her apron with eggs and had climbed over the fence in safety before Dick's slower thoughts had decided.

"I hate to do two mean things. One is bad enough."

"Oh, well, if you want to get found out, and never be allowed to come out here again to the longest day you live, go ahead," cried the spirited Rachel. "Ain't we all the grandchildren he's got in the world, and don't you suppose he likes to have us enjoy ourselves when we come visiting? What's a few eggs, and half of 'em addled, most likely?"

"Are they?" Dick really wanted to know.

"The warm weather addles 'em," said Rachel. "The only way to tell that is to break 'em."

The bombardment of Fort Barn was only concluded with the bursting of the last piece of the ammunition of the attacking party. It was really delightful to hear the egg-shell crack at the moment of impact, and to see the yellow stream that followed crawl slowly down the weather-boarding; but it was a brief delight, and when it was over, Dick spied a wagon moving townward, and ran out to ask for a ride. So Rachel was left alone.

It was very dull. Bridget had gone to her room, and Grandpa was reading in *Divine Providence*. Old Major was off on some business of his own, and the barn cats were of all cats the most unsocial. One hardly ever came within

even spitting distance of a person. Rachel did not care to make either larkspur wreaths or phlox-chains, though there were plenty of available blossoms in the part of the garden called hers. Dick had arranged to collect all the birds' nests, now long since emptied of birdlings, on the morrow, so it would not be fair to take any to-day, and somehow she didn't much care to bring in any moss, her usual way of earning Bridget's enmity. She thought about the eggs, and was appalled at the magnitude of her crime. How should she bear it when four o'clock struck, and Grandpa should come out with the egg-basket? She thought of the Red Astrakhans, and the all-too-certain questions Grandma would propound when she saw the china basket. It would be far easier, however, to see the cold gray light creep into Grandma's eyes, than to know that Grandpa would never suspect her of wrong-doing in the matter of the eggs. How should she bear it?

Poor little Eve! After the joys of the Garden, the Flaming Sword of the Gateway!

It was but ten minutes past three! Out of her trouble there was left only the path of the penitent prodigal. Her Father's house! Her Mother's arms! She must go.

"Grandpa, I want to go home."

He laid *Divine Providence* face downward on his knee.

"What is the matter, Rachel?"

"I want to see Father and Mother."

"You will see them to-morrow."

"I want to see them right now. I want you to get Robin and take me home."

"I have no idea of doing so, however," he said, taking up his book. "Run out and play, like a good little girl, until I call you to come and help me hunt the eggs."

Rachel's fear was great, her remorse was greater, but her temper was greatest of all. She stamped her foot. Her eyes flashed. For the only time in her life she was impertinent to the kind old friend whose beautiful and serene spirit spread its own divine calm about him.

"I tell you I *will* go home! So now!"

This time *Divine Providence* was closed firmly and finally. The large dark eyes looked sorrowfully down at the angry child. The Swedish seer had no practical advice for a case like this for which Experience was the only teacher. It was hard to turn the tender little one to so grim a schoolmaster, but it had to be done.

“If you wish to go home, Rachel, you can go.”

“How can I, if you won’t take me?”

“You have two feet, my dear.”

“So I have. Good-by!”

There was no loving kiss, only the angry seizure of the straw hat and the blue parasol, and the swift flight of the little figure down the long path that led to the gate and the public road,—a wild little Ishmaelite, whose sins goaded her into an angry arraignment of the whole world.

Her breath gave out before she had run the length of the first field, and before she had reached the shelter of the twin oak trees that stood in the middle of the road a little rain began to fall. Now that Rachel reflected, she remembered that the sun had been hidden for several hours, and that the skies had been quite darkened before the assault on Fort Barn had been concluded. Perhaps, however, it was only a passing shower, and so she would stand in between the trees and wait.

The drops fell faster and faster on the leafy roof above her. The little elves of the rain were whispering together with a cool, delicious murmur, as they hastened about on their task of cleansing and refreshing the tired old earth.

What a busy, cheerful obedience was theirs, as they beat down the soft dust of the road! How clean and pure was the wind that touched the cheeks of the little girl! A thousand fancies, born of the raindrops and of the fragrant Summer day, would have soothed and charmed her, but for the weight that lay on her heart. She must hasten on.

The roadway was muddy now, very muddy, and her shoes were heavy as she dragged them from the soft earth. Tutu hated muddy shoes, and she said children often got ill from having wet feet, and sometimes they even died. Oh, how Rachel hoped she would not die of wet feet before she got home! As bad as she was, it would be awful! If she could only get her shoes dried!

There was a little house at the very edge of the Village which had often excited the curiosity of the children, but about which they had never asked any questions. Spruce trees grew in a dense thicket before the door, between which and the gate was the cabbage garden and the potato patch. In the Village itself the civic conscience demanded a clear bit of lawn in everybody's yard; even the poorest people had a few rods of

grass, but here was no grass, only vegetables. It did not promise much, but a thin line of smoke ascended from behind the spruce trees, so there must be a fire there by which wet feet could be dried. Rachel went in.

Everybody in the Village knew, or they ought to know, that besides their own Relations and Particular Friends, and the World in General, there lived within sound of the Court House clock, criminals of matchless powers for evil and of unexampled malignity. They pretended to be this or that, and all the while the children knew, and the Grown-ups might have known, that they were genii, goblins, and witches, who lived only to harm in secret and who worked so cunningly that they were never found out. Sophy Jane was witch-finder-in-general, a trait she had inherited from her old Salem ancestry. She knew to a certainty who had the evil eye, and dark and terrible were the tales she told of mysterious disappearances, midnight rides on broomsticks, black cats, and "spells." The souls of her listeners were harrowed by her recitals, which she sometimes rendered more potent by surreptitious peeps at the pictures in the forbidden *Ingoldsby Legends*, which they read

whenever the books could be smuggled from the Doctor's shelves. She had witch-names for all the people whose appearance did not please her, and of them all no name was so awesome as that of Mrs. Earbobs.

Rachel knocked at the door of the little house behind the fir trees. It was opened by no less a person than Mrs. Earbobs, while a black cat appeared from under the step, and was ready to rub itself against Rachel's legs.

It was a critical moment. Rachel was a curious compound of cowardice, and what Napoleon called "two-o'clock-in-the-morning courage." It was the turn of the courage now, so she walked in pleasantly, and took her seat by the kitchen stove, which stood in the main room of the cottage.

"I'm the Doctor's little girl," she said, lifting the cat to her knees, and perching her shoes on the hearth. "I've been spending the day at Grandpa's at Linwood; I was going to stay all night — but — well — I decided to go home. So I had to walk and my shoes are very wet. I thought maybe you'd let me dry them so I won't die."

Mrs. Earbobs looked at her. Her eyes were

very near-sighted, so she frowned a good deal, and the large golden hoops that hung from her ears, and that had impressed Sophy Jane, shook as she bent down to catch Rachel's words.

"You *was* to stay all night," she repeated, crossly, "but you *decided* to go home, an' you was allowed to walk! What you been up to?"

"Up to?" Rachel trembled.

"Yes! Up to! Can't you hear? It don't sound straight." Mrs. Earbobs went on severely. "The folks up to Linwood ain't the kind to let you go traipsin' about the world, over muddy roads in the rain, with nothin' to pectect you but that 'ere little blue umbrelly, 'less sumpin' was up. I've seen children before now! I know 'em!"

"I — I wanted to go home," said Rachel.

Mrs. Earbobs viewed the little shoes with disfavor.

"There's worse things 'n muddy shoes," she said "an' one of 'em's a muddy heart. What you been up to?"

Rachel arose with much dignity.

"I'm afraid I must go," she said. "Thank you for letting me come in. I hope I didn't spoil the nice clean floor."

"What you been up to?" reiterated the woman, sharply. "Tell, I say! Have you got it in your pocket?"

Rachel was outside the door. She felt the strength of her youth in her feet.

"Sophy Jane *said* you were a witch," she announced, and then she flew.

"I'll Sophy Jane her and you, too!" screamed Mrs. Earbobs, angrily. "What was you up to? Have you got it in your pocket? Half's mine!"

Rachel heard no more; she was around the curve in the road before the shrill voice died away, and not until then did she discover that her precious blue parasol was left behind in the witch's cave. Well, the cat might have it for all she cared. She couldn't get much wetter if she tried. So she plodded on.

The very last house in the Village was a carpenter-shop. The Carpenter was a little Englishman, and he and his old Swedish wife lived near the shop. He was the friend of all little children, though he had none of his own, and it was with sincere gladness that Rachel saw him leaning beside the door of his shop, smoking his short black pipe.

“Why, Rachel,” cried the Carpenter. “How’s this?”

Rachel was tired of evasions. The Carpenter’s eyes were kind, and even his gray whiskers bristled with benevolence. She took the hand he reached down to her, and sprang up lightly into the clean little shop.

“I went out to Grandpa’s to spend the night,” she confessed. “I’ve done four bad things, and I’m going home to ask Mother to forgive me. She always does.”

“Well, now, I dare say you wasn’t so dreadful bad,” said the Carpenter, kindly. “But it’s right for folks to ask for pardon. Real ladies always do, and your mother couldn’t have a little girl that wasn’t a real lady.”

Rachel was humbled.

“I’m afraid she has, though,” she said contritely. “I’m worse than you could possibly believe. I’ve told a lie, or at least I’ve done one; and I’ve stolen, or at least it was just the same, for the eggs weren’t mine. And bad as it was to smash them, and to bang the Red Astrakhans, it was really worse to be hateful to dear Grandpa and to call Mrs. Earbobs a witch. Mother will be so ashamed of me, and I’m

ashameder than I can think myself. I just *had* to hurry home to tell her, and oh, — do you think she'll punish me? I hope she will, really hard. If I'd told Grandpa, he'd never have said a word, but just looked at me, and I'd have known he was thinking how sorry my very own Grandmother would be in Heaven, and that I could not have borne. I do try to be good, but I seem to get badder and badder every day. I need not have called her a witch, though."

"Who — a witch?"

"Mrs. Earbobs. The — lady — who lives up in the little house yonder. Sophy Jane always said she was a witch; but it was worse than horrid in me to call her so."

"Oh, I see! No; the poor body isn't a witch; but she's not quite right in her mind. She would not remember what you said two minutes after you were gone, so you did not do her any real harm."

Rachel was glad to hear that, but she was more than glad when the good old Carpenter took her by the hand, and said kindly:—

"We'll go into the house now, and the old Wife will dry you nicely, and give us both some supper. I am going into the Village for some

screws after a bit, so I'll take you home safe under my umbrella, and then you can tell your trouble to your mother. You ain't a bad little girl at heart, Rachel, for all you do get into such a sight of scrapes, and I don't doubt you'll grow up to be a fine woman, some day, like your mother."

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